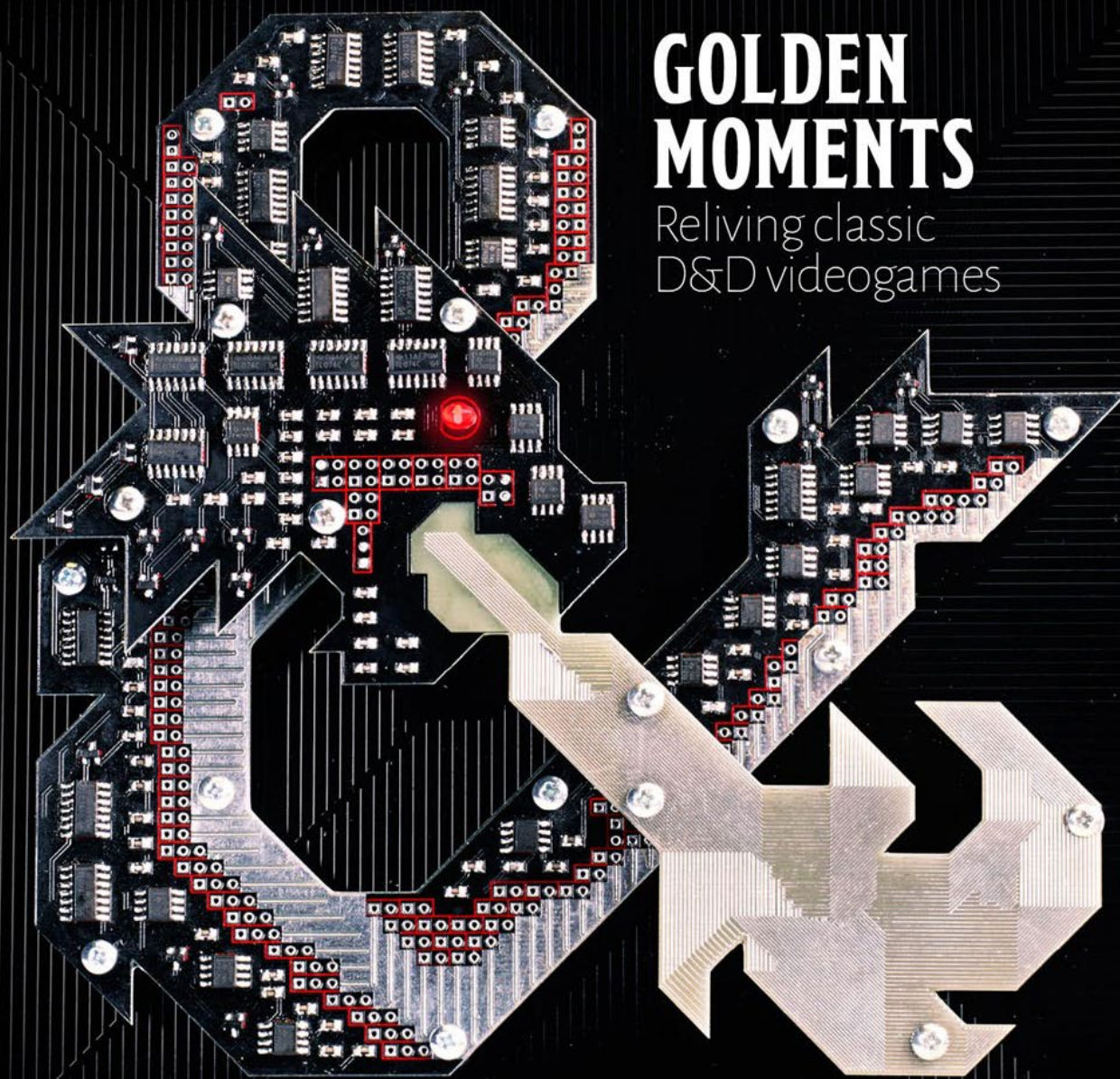


ADAM LEE'S EXCLUSIVE SHORT STORY: THE THWEEN

DRAGON+

GOLDEN MOMENTS

Reliving classic
D&D videogames



WINNING RACES: DISSECTING THE DUERGAR + SWORD COAST LEGENDS

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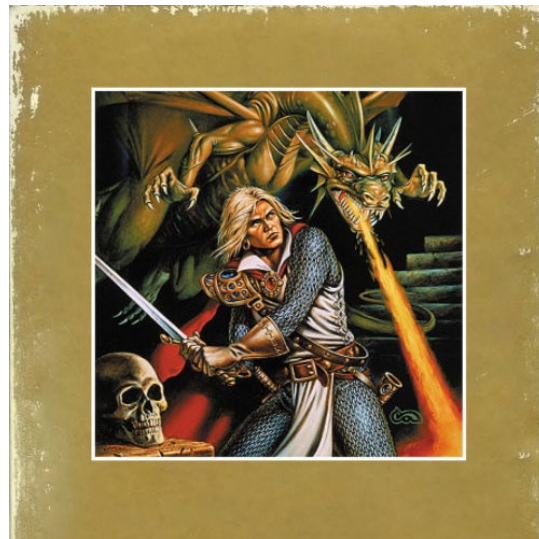
«SWIPE to the NEXT PAGE»

ISSUE 4

DRAGON+ 4

Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 4

With four issues of the all-new Dragon+ app under our belt, how have those Wisdom (Perception) checks been coming along? We hope you've been rolling high enough to notice a dedicated theme to our front covers, especially as we've not been shy about shouting about the artists involved.



Discovering the Gold Box

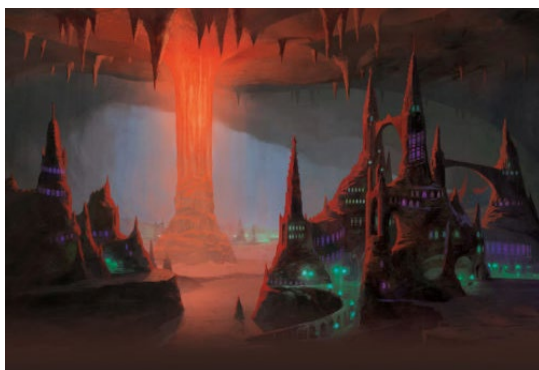
As Good Old Games revives thirteen classic Dungeons & Dragons titles for a modern audience, we asked the team who worked on them and today's game designers and producers to give us their favorite memories.



Winning Races: Duergar

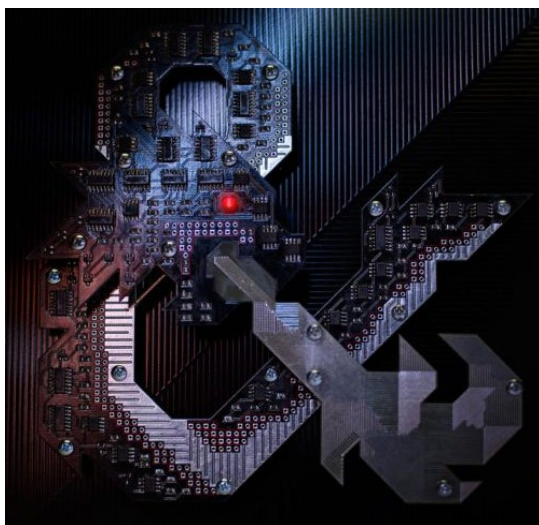
Jay Turner, narrative director of Sword Coast Legends, takes an in-depth look at a race of cold, hard working dwarves with some surprising abilities.

ISSUE 4



Travel Talk: Dare to Descend

Writer Melisande Calador dared to descend into one of the most inhospitable regions in Faerûn to bring you news of its sights, smells and fungal delights.



Imagining The



Neverwinter Strongholds

Neverwinter the free-to-play MMORPG allowed guilds to

Ampersand: Nick Bartoletti and Lars Larsen

Wizards of the Coast art director Nick Bartoletti joined forces with design engineer Lars Larsen of LZX Industries to create this issue's cover, an unconventional interpretation of the Dragon Ampersand.

build their own keeps, now with Strongholds Siege they must protect them from invading guilds. Matt Chapman learns the secrets to a successful siege campaign.

ISSUE 4



Demonomicon of Iggwilv: Belaphoss, Devourer of Hope

The true nature of Demogorgon's chief warlord is revealed in pages torn from the infamous wizard's writings...



Fiction: The Thweem

Wherein I encounter the thweem, infused with the rage of demon lords, and unwittingly succumb to its madness.



Interview: Jay Turner

From an early Mass Effect mauling to hanging with A-list demon lords, Sword Coast Legends's narrative director shares his journey.

ISSUE 4



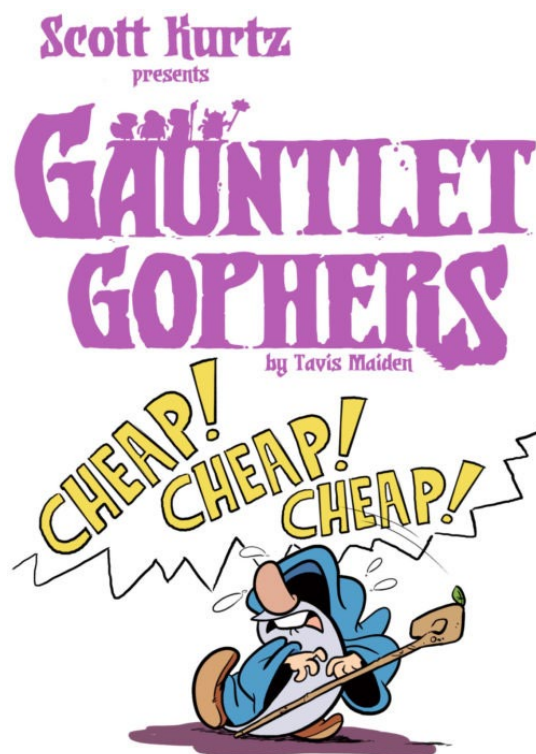
Streaming Highlights

The creators of Rage of Demons dig into the storyline, Canadian rocker Matthew Good talks about his love of the world of Greyhawk, and charity scores a critical hit with Extra Life 2015.



Beyond the Board: An Introduction to Dice Masters

Dungeons & Dragons has expanded into the world of Dice Masters. Can you assemble an epic team and win the Battle for Faerûn?



ISSUE 4

Adventurer's League: Tavern Tales

Greg Bilsland relives the sugary highs and the caffeine lows of the forty-eight-hour Extra Life charity fundraiser, while the Red Plumes are up to no good in the Hillsfar region in Shackles of Blood.

Next Issue: Dragon 04

There's no need to cast Divination to discover next issue's goodies: we speak to Forgotten Realms creator Ed Greenwood about his latest novel, remember Dungeons & Dragons videogames gone by and dig deep into the latest action RPG Sword Coast Legends.



A big thank you to the extended
D&D family for their help with
the creation of this issue.

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DRAGON+ 4

Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 4

With four issues of the all-new Dragon+ app under our belt, how have those Wisdom (Perception) checks been coming along? We hope you've been rolling high enough to notice a dedicated theme to our front covers, especially as we've not been shy about shouting about the artists involved.

Matt Chapman

These visionaries have taken the dragon motif of the D&D Ampersand and celebrated it in different forms. Last issue's enormous 3D sculpture of Zuggtmoy cradling the Ampersand blew us away with its detail, and this month's effort is just as impressive. See page ten for more on this fantasy techno creation by LZX Industries.



Zuggtmoy may have been banished from our cover this month, but you can't keep a bad demon lord down, and the Rage of Demons adventure continues to spread its madness across all aspects of D&D. With Halloween just around the corner, there's no better time for these monsters to terrify the inhabitants of the Underdark, and a short story from D&D writer Adam Lee highlights

the terror Orcus brings (see page fifteen).

Yet it's the scary new kid on the block who makes us glad there's no magic item slot for pants (think about it...). As CRPG videogame *Sword Coast Legends* makes its debut, we get our first proper introduction to Belaphoss. Or to give him his full title, Belaphoss the Mad, Devourer of Hope and Dread General of the Gibbering Hordes. Gulp. Scour the pages of the *Demonomicon of Iggwilv* (page thirteen) to find out more about this ancient and powerful balor. Just pray you never need that knowledge to battle the beast they also call the Left Hand of Demogorgon.

While we cower at the sight of the new blood in D&D videogaming, we also marvel at the classic D&D Gold Box videogames as they are released in three bundled collections (see page five). To celebrate that launch, we asked the teams who made them and today's game developers who were inspired by them to get a little bit nostalgic and share their memories. So sit back and enjoy their tales of the time they were haughty to a monster or cleaved a whole room full of enemies in a few swings (or were creeped out by the sound of those spiders behind the door and the sight of a certain mystical toilet). Enjoy their recollections and remember: don't have nightmares.

Matt Chapman, Editor-in-chief
[email matt](#)

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Discovering the Gold Box

As Good Old Games revives thirteen classic Dungeons & Dragons titles for a modern audience, we asked the team who worked on them and today's game designers and producers to give us their favorite memories.

In the 1980s and '90s, spin-off videogames based on the Dungeons & Dragons roleplay system were all the rage, as the Forgotten Realms provided a rich backdrop for these RPG adventures. Yet you didn't have to be born to the sounds of Duran

Duran and Queen or Billy Joel and EMF to reminisce about their low-fi pleasures and old-school storytelling. Good Old Games has dusted off thirteen classic titles, removed the bugs they shipped with and launched the Gold Box collections for modern gamers to enjoy.

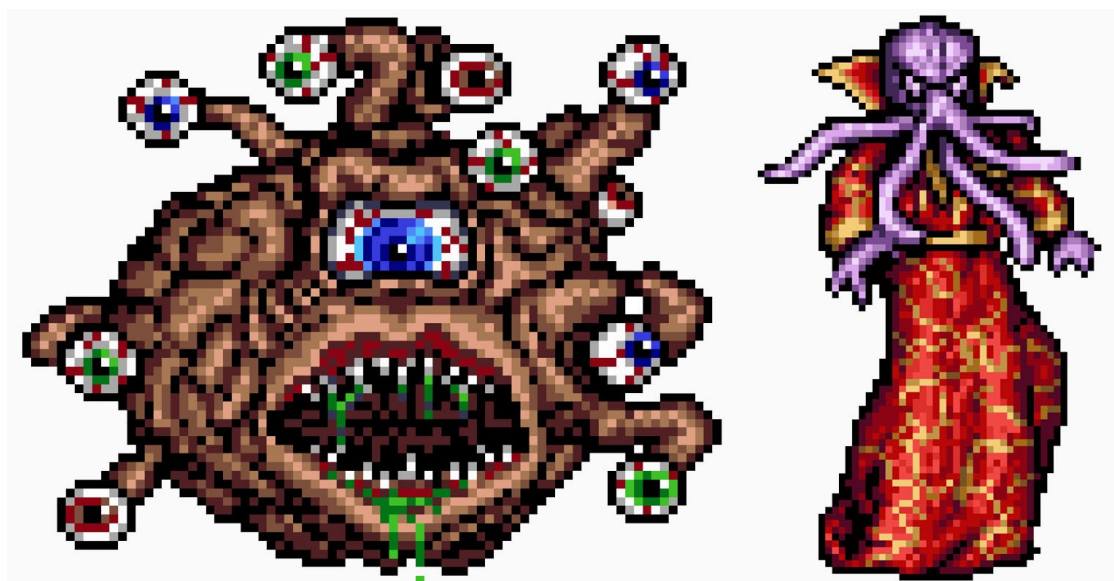
The three releases bundle multiple games together, including:

Forgotten Realms: The Archives Collection 1 (*Eye of the Beholder I, II & III*)

Forgotten Realms: The Archives Collection 2 (*Pool of Radiance, Curse of the Azure Bonds, Hillsfar, Secret of the Silver Blades, Pools of Darkness, Gateway to the Savage Frontier, Treasures of the Savage Frontier, Forgotten Realms Unlimited Adventures*)

Forgotten Realms: The Archives Collection 3 (*Dungeon Hack, Menzoberranzan*)

In honor of their return, we asked key game designers and producers and those who actually worked on the games to relive their favorite experiences, and they didn't disappoint...



Vegas, Baby!

“I have great memories of working on the first *Eye of the Beholder* game. In order to get the game out on time, I moved to Las Vegas for three weeks and worked on-site with the developers, Westwood Studios. The first *Eye of the Beholder* was the most beautiful AD&D

Computer Game I had seen at that time. The monsters and environments, and the slick interface looked great. The game could be played equally well with mouse, keyboard or a combination. And reaction time mattered. When a player saw a monster coming at their party, it was imperative to skillfully combine moving and fighting to keep the party alive.



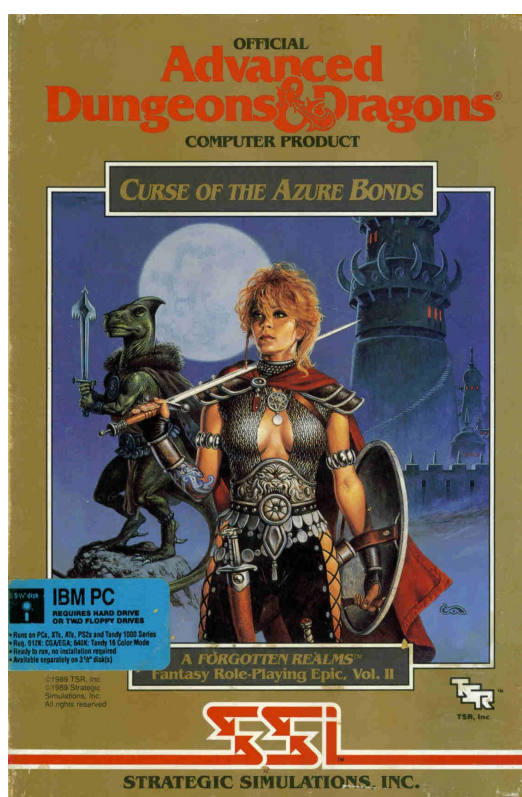
“I still have memories of the fear that greeted players on level three. Giant poisonous spiders roamed the halls. And when the spiders were nearby, the player could hear them, even through doors and walls. If the player came to a door and heard a scuttling sound, they had to wonder if there were spiders that would pounce on them the moment it was opened. The tension was delicious.

“The finale, against the game’s namesake, was also a memorable puzzle that required exact timing and clever reasoning. I hope players today enjoy *Eye of the Beholder* as much as I enjoyed helping bring it to market.”

George MacDonald, producer on *Eye of the Beholder*

Strong Bonds

“When I was in middle and high



school, I had an Atari ST. Like a lot of people who own things that are impressive yet inexplicably unpopular, I fancied myself a visionary technology connoisseur who was maybe also pretty impressive (yet inexplicably unpopular). I loved that machine like only a teenage nerd could, but even I would admit at least one drawback: it had way, way too few D&D games. And for a kid who ran to the mailbox at full tilt every single day to see if my copy of *Dragon* had shown up yet, an AD&D game that you could play any time without having to leave

your room was basically a Sphere of Spare Time Annihilation.



“Because my poor ST never saw a release of *Pool of Radiance*, my campaign to acquire the sequel, *Curse of the Azure Bonds*, knew absolutely no bounds once it showed up at my local computer shop. In the end, I took an advance on my next Christmas and birthday presents and I was tearing away the shrink wrap before the receipt hit my mom’s hand. When I got it home and fired it up, it did not disappoint.

“Sure, maybe the graphics were a little weak and the sound was best replaced by a Led Zeppelin tape as soon as possible, but this was real D&D, and the kind I liked to play, too. Not just a dungeon to raid, but a huge swath of countryside with taverns and armories and NPCs with their own backstories that you could hire into your party. It actually made a difference whether your characters were fighters or

paladins, and when you encountered a monster you could choose to be “haughty” to it. Haughty!



“Although I didn’t know it at the time, *Curse of the Azure Bonds* was probably the first experience I had with emergent gameplay in a videogame. It wasn’t just that there was more than one solution to a problem, it was that some problems didn’t even seem to arise unless a few different factors were present that might cause them. I didn’t have a name for it, but that type of experience really felt like roleplaying to me. And once I knew that a computer could create that feeling, I wanted it badly enough that I would buy (and, eventually, try to make) one game after another just to see how good it could get.

“So thanks, *Curse of the Azure Bonds*! Because of my weird computer-buying choices, I may not have been able to play a lot of the Gold Box games, but I certainly got a lot out of the one that I did!”

Demetri Detsaridis, external producer for *Snow Cannon Games*

Squaring Up To The Circle

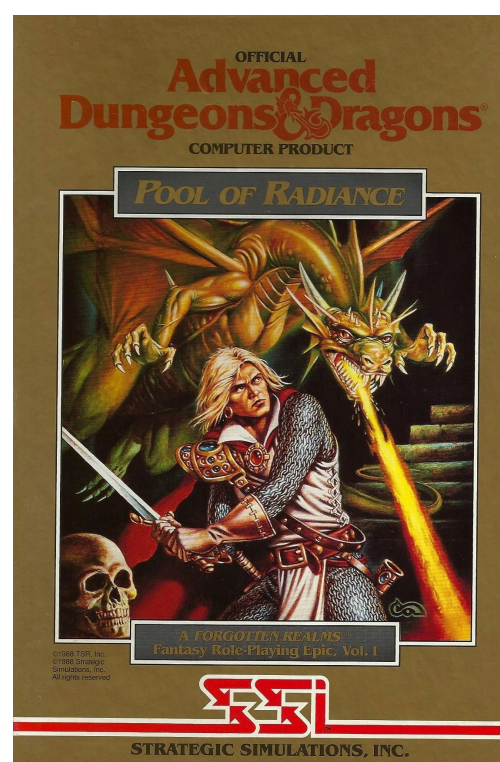
“I played most of the Gold Box games and I remember the first time my fighter executed the ‘cleave’ ability to full effect. I had stepped

into a vast room and was beset by a massive crowd of orcs, with enemy spell casters in the distance. I was immediately panicked as there seemed no way for me to quickly make it through the mass of orcs to reach these casters. The monsters had their turn and my fighter character was surrounded by orcs. When his turn came, I attacked the orc in front of him and was floored with amazement as he struck down six of the orcs surrounding him. Within three attack rounds the orcs melted away and I was toe to toe with an enemy caster. I still remember the elation of seeing the fighter hit, kill the orc, turn to the next orc, kill it and continue in the circle, wiping out an army in a few rounds. That really sold the concept of a high-level fighter confronted with large numbers of underpowered enemy minions. Great times.”

Trent Oster, creative director on *Baldur's Gate: Enhanced Edition* and former director on *Neverwinter Nights*

Talent Pool

“*Pool of Radiance* was my first opportunity to shine as a designer, and watch SSI transform from a small strategy games house, into a powerful RPG company. The Forgotten Realms Gold Box games caused SSI to grow rapidly. George MacDonald and I, as the designers, got pushed out into the unheated warehouse. We had to make our desks out of piles of shrink-wrapped game boxes. Thankfully, although it was winter, the temperature never actually dropped to freezing. Still, our breath misted as we worked.



“I had been playing D&D from its early days in the '70s, along with several other team members, so it was more than just a bunch of numbers and rules. We understood what aspects to emphasize, what

we could better adapt for the computer environment, and what we could ignore. Several of us played in a weekly game since high school – the group still plays weekly to this day – so we could easily fall into a discussion about the pros and cons of quests and rules, and even test things out when we got together.



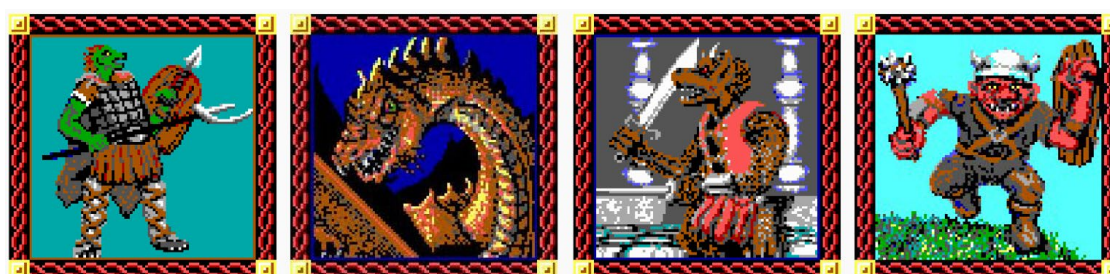
“All the development was on C64 systems, and we used a scripting language based off assembly. It was very intense. With *Secret of the Silver Blades*, I became producer, lead designer and head of the scripting department, so I got to juggle a lot more plates. The

technology was shifting, so we had internal discussions over tech specs, and whether to just make a dungeon crawler and dump any pretense at story. The design team won that argument, and we continued to put an emphasis on storyline. I still strive to recreate the great balance of exploration and story we achieved back then.”

David Shelley, former designer at SSI and lead designer on *Seven Dragon Saga* at TSI.

Advanced Graphics

“As a Dungeon Master and budding game designer, Gold Box games were very influential in showing what could be done, and proving that the computer could provide an enjoyable RPG experience. And if you were an RPG player, *Pool of Radiance* was the game to play when it came out. I remember being excited about it because it was the first ‘official’ AD&D computer game, and I played a lot of AD&D with my friends growing up.

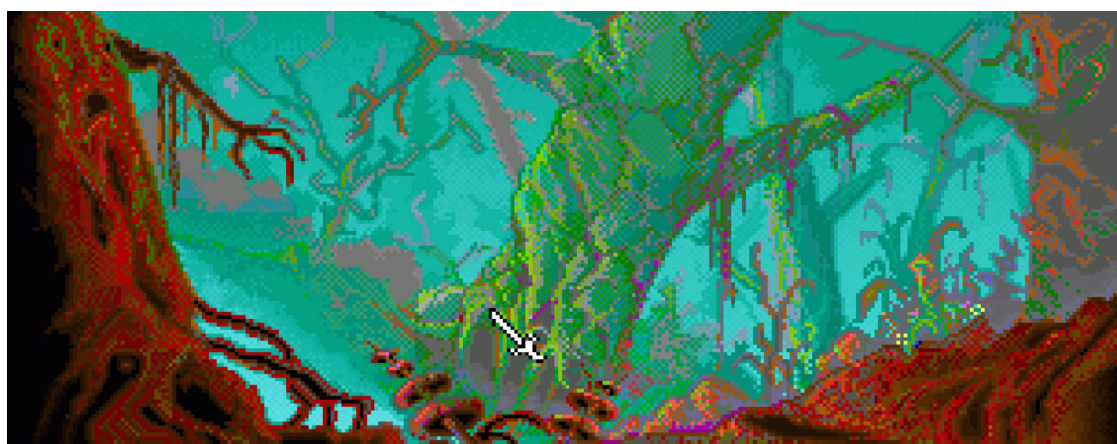


“To me, one of the most thrilling parts was that the graphics depicting the monsters were very close to those seen in the monster manual, making it feel like a real Dungeons & Dragons game. Another was that you had character creation with actual choice, such as race, class, gender, alignment and other character customization. The box even contained ‘extras’ and I remember spinning the Translation Wheel to decipher otherwise illegible symbols, and looking up entries in the Adventurer’s Journal.”

Geoffrey Zatkin, external producer for *Snow Cannon Games* and designer on the original *EverQuest* team.

Pixel Perfect

“I did a lot of work on the Amiga ports of the Gold Box games as well as making original artwork. The art department was expanding when I arrived and I was only the second woman after Sue Manley. At the time it was unusual that I had a degree in fine art, since SSI was just then getting past the era of ‘programmer art’. It took a little while to get my art-student head around the limited palettes and low-resolution graphics, but there’s a real technique to that kind of minimal pixel-based drawing. Our department did some pretty attractive work within the limitations. Mark Johnson in particular was a wizard with anti-aliasing in a 16-color fixed EGA palette. The Amiga 2000 was state of the art graphics in 1989: a variable 32-color palette. I was able to upgrade a lot of the ported artwork. When VGA came along, the whole art department was in heaven. Wow, 256 colors! We were sure no one was ever going to need more than that for game art.



“We had a lot of in-house TSR artwork for reference: gorgeous paintings from people like Larry Elmore and Keith Parkinson. But there wasn’t any such thing as a desktop scanner in the department, so we had to redraw everything with a mouse. At the resolutions we worked at, scanned pictures turned to noise and needed heavy editing anyway. At some point my manager got a handheld scanner that you had to move slowly and steadily over the picture to avoid blurring it, and I think it only captured a monochrome image like a fax machine. Graphics tablets were not a thing yet. It was pixel by pixel work, though when a portrait is only 88 pixels by 88 pixels, that’s not as bad as it might sound.



“I’d deliver my work on a floppy and walk down the hall to hand it to a programmer. We had no in-house email system at first, and it was a big deal when we installed a company server. This was long before Google Image Search or CDs with stock photos. I remember cutting lots of pictures out of magazines for my portrait files, and bringing in various books for reference.

“I’m lucky I didn’t have to work on the Apple ports, though. They had a very strange color system, which involved adjacent pixels adding up to a third color. At the time, Apple was all about being serious and world-changing, and games and color were apparently too frivolous to matter. The artist responsible for that machine had a tough job.

“SSI was a good place to work in general, though workplace practices around 1990 were pretty different than they are now. Having other artists all around and the programmers right down the hall was probably better on a personal focus and feedback level than the current style of everyone working remotely on temporary contracts and delivering to the cloud.

“On the other hand, there was a famous incident where a manager

had to distribute a memo reminding some of the programmers and testers to shower, change their clothes once in a while and use deodorant. On the internet, no one knows what you smell like.”

Laura Bowen Shelley (credited as Laura R. Bowen on the SSI games) was a graphic artist at SSI from 1989 to 1993.

You Had Me At Mystery



“It’s easy for me to reminisce about *Eye of the Beholder II*! My brother got it from a friend of his and we played it frequently. I was 12, and everything about the game called to me. It was the prettiest PC game I’d seen since the updated version of *King’s Quest* sketched its screens wildly across my monitor. I had no experience whatsoever with the Forgotten Realms, as I was a Dragonlance reader, so I didn’t know who this Khelben Blackstaff guy was, asking for my help at the beginning. But I was pretty stoked

to do whatever this cool-looking guy said: mystery, missing scout, temple; chill, wizardy man. This sounds awesome. I’m in.



“I remember being surprised at the motives of the two clerics at the beginning, because they looked so perfectly friendly! But my biggest surprise was Insal, the halfling thief you find near the start of the game. You rescue him from a cell, and he offers to join you. You can refuse and send him on his way, but I didn’t even entertain the thought, as I was hugely excited to see my rag-tag party of four expanded to five. OK, the back rows couldn’t do much more than throw rocks if they had no ranged weapons or spells to sling, but I had an extra party member, another arm to chuck debris at foes, and I felt like my powers were growing. I squished some spiders and killed some soldiers, and as I approached the stairs to the next level, I decided it was wise to find a safe room, shut the door, and rest to recover my spells and HP.



“When I awoke, Insal was gone. I was richer one ‘sorry, guys’ note, and poorer... whatever Insal had on him. And I’d unwisely been using him as a mule for several of my potions, which were now gone forever. That made me kind of furious, as any player gets when something is taken from them, but I was also stunned and a little excited that it had happened. I’d picked up a random thief and – surprise! – they actually turned out to be someone I couldn’t really trust. It was the first time I’d ever run into something like that in a game, where who you added to your party had actual consequences, instead of being essentially just a collectable. It may even have been the first time someone did something in-character after they joined my party, not just before.

“I’m told Insal comes back to help you later, and I’m embarrassed to say I haven’t beaten the game, yet, but this escape and theft is something that’s really stuck with me. To make him the very first character you come across, and that you’re so excited to have more help in these dank catacombs, is a wonderfully clever dirty trick that makes you wary of whomever else joins you later on. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to reinstall the game, save Insal, and not take him along this time. I’ve learned my lesson, you halfling punk.

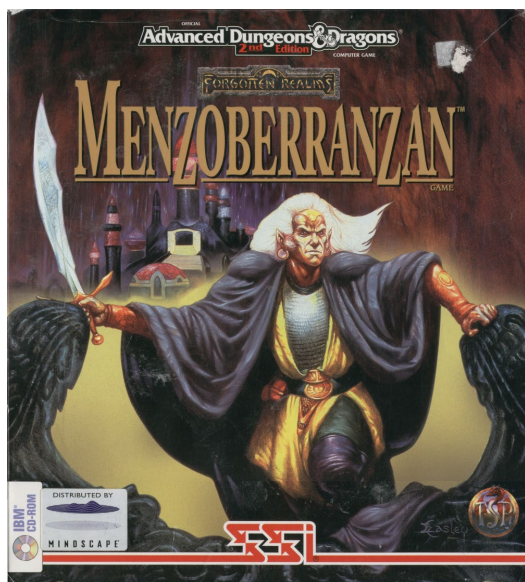
Annie VanderMeer Mitsoda, writer and designer at DoubleBear Productions

Caught In Possession

“I loved those classic D&D games. At the time they were strategic turn-based gems. I remember *Pool of Radiance* being really tough. I think it was fairly early on when a possessed brass dragon came out of one of the pools and obliterated my low-level party. I also really enjoyed *Curse of the Azure Bonds* and I remember going back and reading the book whilst I was playing it. I guess that was a triumph for early cross-category branding.”

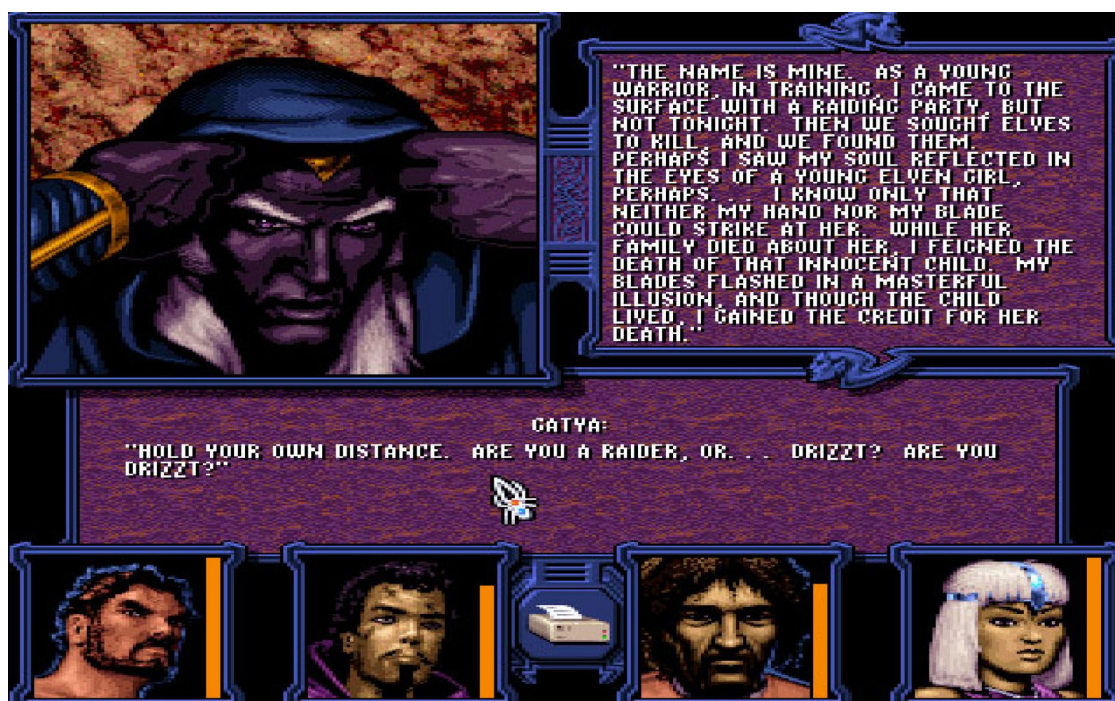
Steve Buckmaster, managing director at Esdevium Games

Collateral Damage



“Young players will quote The Witcher, The Elder Scrolls or Dragon Age as RPG references today but older gamers remember the SSI games with emotion. They had good stories and, above all, very tactical battlegrounds and were a really important part of videogames history. I’m very happy to see these new compilations contain *Pool of Radiance*, *Curse of the Azure Bonds* and *Menzoberranzan* (involving Drizzt Do’Urden, one

of my favorite ever fantasy universe characters, alongside Raistlin Majere from *Dragonlance*).



"Sorry modern-day JRPG fans, but in those games if you send a cloud of poison somewhere in the room and members of your party are inside, they will take damage. It always makes me laugh in certain JRPG games when a Bahamut goes into space, throws a huge ray that destroys the earth in an epic cut-scene, with the only consequence being to hurt some of the enemies a little bit."

Cyril Berrebi, a former editor-in-chief of *Official Xbox Magazine* in France, now works for game developer Microïds, which is currently producing adventure games (*Agatha Christie – The A.B.C. Murders*, *Yesterday Origins*, *Syberia 3*), *Moto Racer 4* and a tactical RPG based on TV series *The Dungeon of Naheulbeuk*.

License To Thrill

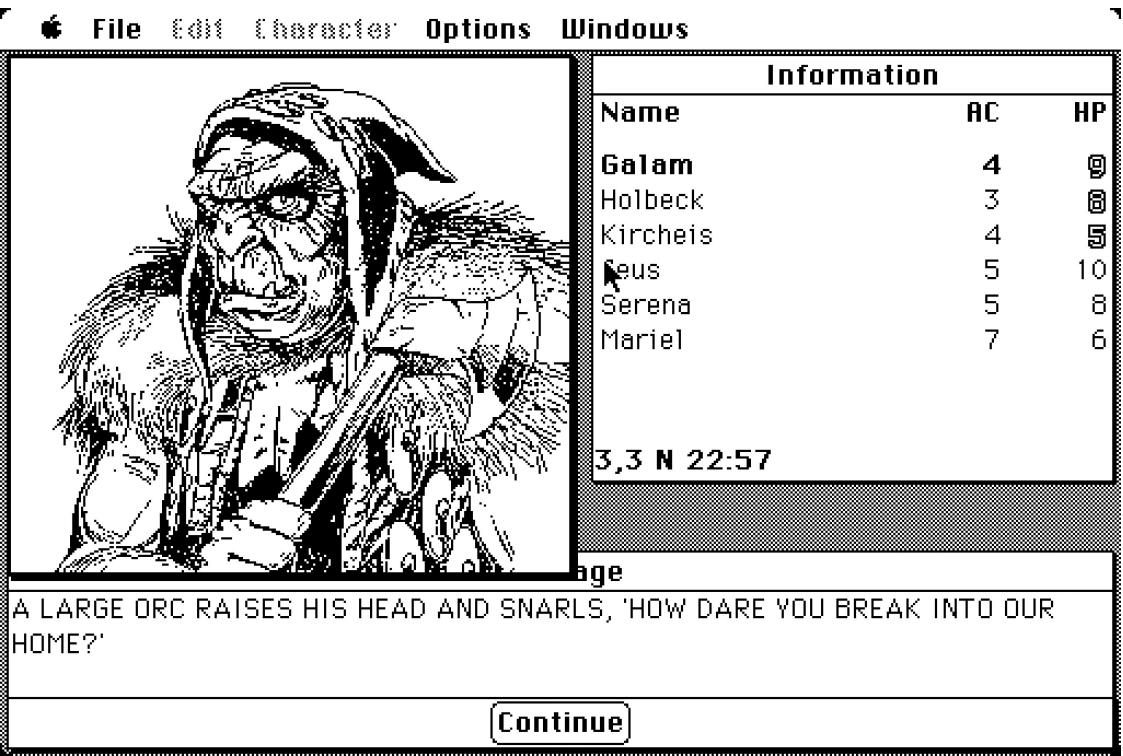


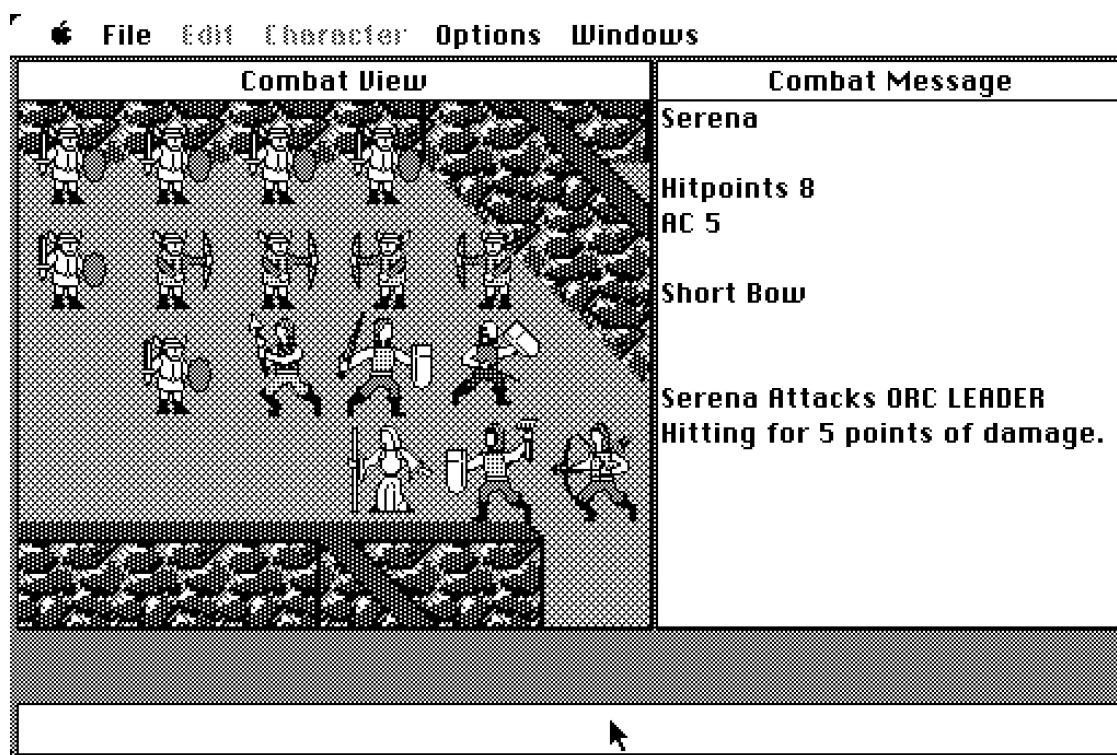
"I started playing D&D back in 1977 or 1978. It was my experience and passion for roleplaying games that helped SSI get the D&D license for computer games, as I traveled to TSR in Lake Geneva as part of team that

acquired it. My friends and I played all sorts of role-playing games before and during the development of *Pool of Radiance*. For me it

was more about getting the rules accurate in the computer game and with years of RPG experience, much of it D&D, it made the task easier. Jim Ward and the others from TSR supplied most of the story.

“It was exciting to bring the feeling of a D&D party adventuring and setting things right to personal computer owners. The 2D graphics were displayed using the engine I had written for *Wizard’s Crown* and other SSI wargames. But these games were extremely advanced for the time. The C64 and Apple II versions were written completely in 6502 assembly and those computers only had around 48,000 bytes of Ram. The personal computer I’m using now has 166,000 times as much memory.



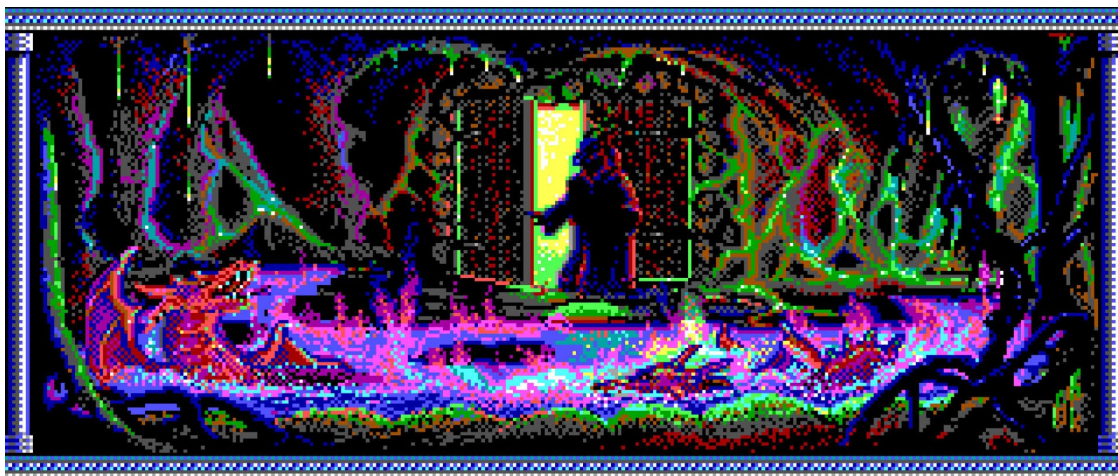


“The part I didn’t like was the grueling ten and twelve-hour work days, plus some weekends, during the development of *Pool of Radiance*. But it’s fun to talk to people I work with now about those early days of D&D computer games. Especially since I am the lead programmer for the D&D MMO *Neverwinter Online*.”

Keith Brors, former senior programmer at SSI, is now senior game programmer for *Neverwinter Online* at Cryptic Studios.

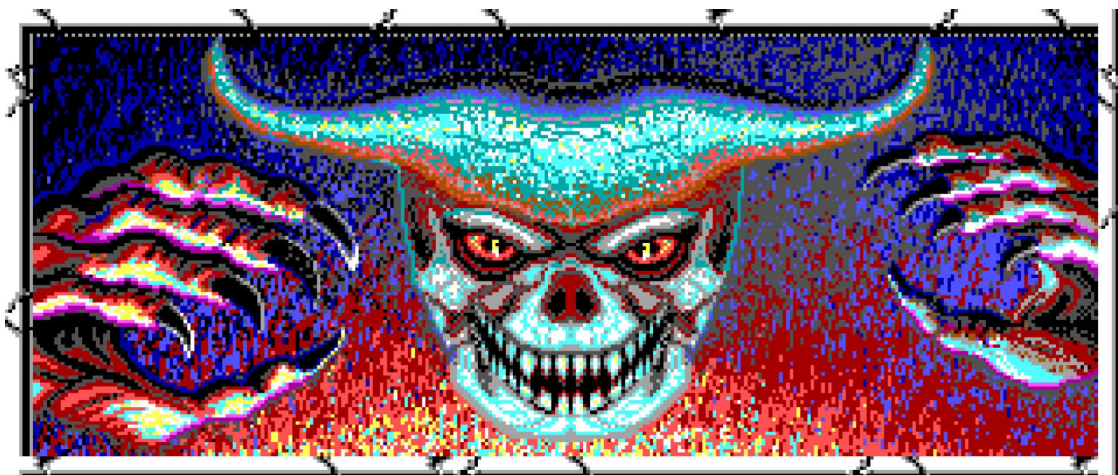
Toilet Humor

“I first played AD&D when I was 17, which was about 10 years before I worked on the games. I was familiar with the *Player’s Handbook*, the *Monster Manual* and the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* but I hadn’t read the *Forgotten Realms* books at that time, as I mostly read science fiction. So I read the books as we made the games and they helped me design the various art pieces and understand the places described better. It was engrossing.



“These were the first computer games I had worked on; this was the first time I was getting paid to create computer graphics all day, every day, on a subject I knew well; and I was also the first woman working in R&D at SSI full time in development. So a lot of firsts.

“I remember working hard to get as much action into static images as we could and then when we could create simple animations, doing them in such a way that they were very dynamic. *Curse of the Azure Bonds* is my favorite because we had gotten really good at C64 art, as well as *Secrets of the Silver Blades* – we started on the IBM PC and then brought it back down to the C64 and Apple II, so the resulting art was better.



“The same can’t be said for the final graphic in SSI’s flagship product, *The Pool of Radiance*. It had been described as a bowl of water on an altar. It was the final scene and we actually put three-stage animation into the graphics. So I drew a swirling bowl of water, on a heavily draped table flanked by skull candle holders. It wasn’t until the product had shipped and we were converting art for the IBM

PC when Chuck Kroegel, the VP of R&D at Strategic Simulations, came up behind me and said, ‘That looks like a toilet.’ I was horrified. And then I sat back and laughed. The designer, the test team and the art director had all seen the same graphic, but only Chuck saw that it indeed looked like a mundane object in the real world. I still laugh when I tell that story. That altar toilet, as the final scene in the game, shipped in every version. If you were lucky enough to finish the game you got to visit the ‘Toilet of Radiance’.

Susan Manley was lead artist and project manager at SSI and is now COO and executive producer for **Olde Sküül**

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Winning Races: Duergar

Jay Turner, narrative director of *Sword Coast Legends*, takes an in-depth look at a race of cold, hard working dwarves with some surprising abilities.

“We’ve seen a fair amount of drow, elves and dwarves but the duergar don’t get a lot of press in my experience. They’re just conceptually an interesting race of beings that traditional RPGs haven’t really messed with,” says Jay Turner, narrative director of the *Sword Coast Legends* videogame. “The duergar city of Gracklstugh is a major player in the Underdark, so it’s interesting to go into a new place in the world and deal with types of characters that we haven’t really looked that closely at.”

These dark reflections of the more traditional Forgotten Realms



dwarves are physically similar to their counterparts in some ways, but are more wiry and lean, with black eyes, bald heads and long, unkempt, gray beards for the males. Their differences come from a catastrophe in their past. Where Tolkien's dwarves dug too deep and found a balrog, the Faerûn dwarves delved deeper than any dwarf ever had before, and were enslaved by mind flayers for eons. Although they eventually won their freedom, it changed them forever.

Gray dwarves, as they are also known, are grim and bitter. They expect nothing from life but unending labor and suffering, and their only joy comes from inflicting the same misery on others. They have the typical dwarven appreciation for order, tradition, and impeccable craftwork, but their goods are purely utilitarian, shunning aesthetic or artistic value. These grim, ashen-skinned dwarves now take slaves of their own and are as tyrannical as their former masters, although they seem to prefer selling captives over killing them.

“Where the drow are chaotic and mean, the duergar just don't care about you,” Turner adds. “They're cool in that they're indifferent to anything but work, and they're very dour and they don't go in for decorations or fun times. All they care about is what they have to do and making sure they do it to the extent that they can.”



GROWTH SPURT

Duergar are a sub-race of dwarves and therefore share the same racial traits, as listed in the *Player's Handbook*, with some surprising additions in the tabletop roleplaying game. That includes the innate ability to shrug off their small stature and grow to ogre size, or turn invisible.

“From a gamer standpoint, a lot of D&D monsters can feel very random. Wow, there are these dwarves that have weird powers! The fact that duergar can turn invisible and grow to giant size and have quill shooting abilities makes them strange and interesting,” says Turner.

“As you read up on duergar society, you think what would a society be like if every single person in that society could turn invisible? Would you ever have an open conversation with someone because you don't know who's standing around? How would that affect how these people operate? And that became very, very interesting.”

In the tabletop roleplaying game, when a duergar reaches third level, they can cast the enlarge spell; and when they reach fifth level, they can cast *invisibility*. Both spells can be recast following a long rest, unless they are in the Underdark, when the ambient magic of the faerzress restores the powers after only a short rest.

If you're thinking that makes this race an attractive pick for your next character, it's likely you'll need to check with your Dungeon Master to see if you can play as a duergar. Few duergar become adventurers and those who do leave their subterranean cities are usually exiles. Fewer still make it to the surface world, because they are a hidebound and suspicious race, but also because they struggle in daylight. Thanks to their Sunlight Sensitivity, they have disadvantage on attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight, and cannot use their duergar magic abilities.



STEELY PRESENCE

Gracklstugh is also known. Their underground lives are made much easier thanks to the duergar's superior darkvision, which has a range of 120 feet. It also doesn't hurt that their natural resilience gives them advantage on saving throws against poisons, illusions, paralysis or being charmed.

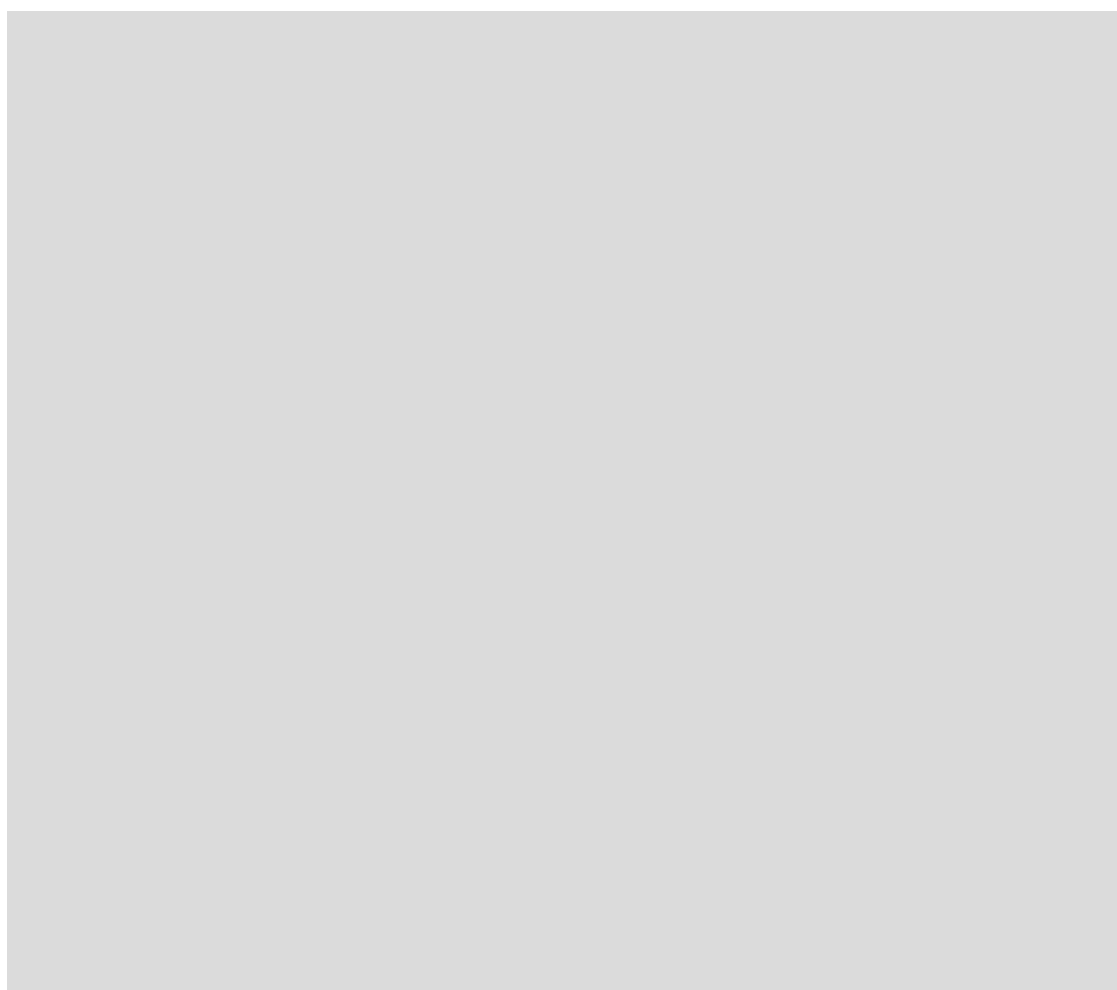
Smithing is key to the city and the fine steel they produce is impressive, considering the quality of the iron they start with, allowing them to demand high prices. Yet duergar may choose to follow many paths, including becoming clerics, lairds, psions, mages, shamans, thieves, miners or merchants. Their best fighters ascend to serve the Stoneguard, a 500-strong elite royal force that serves King

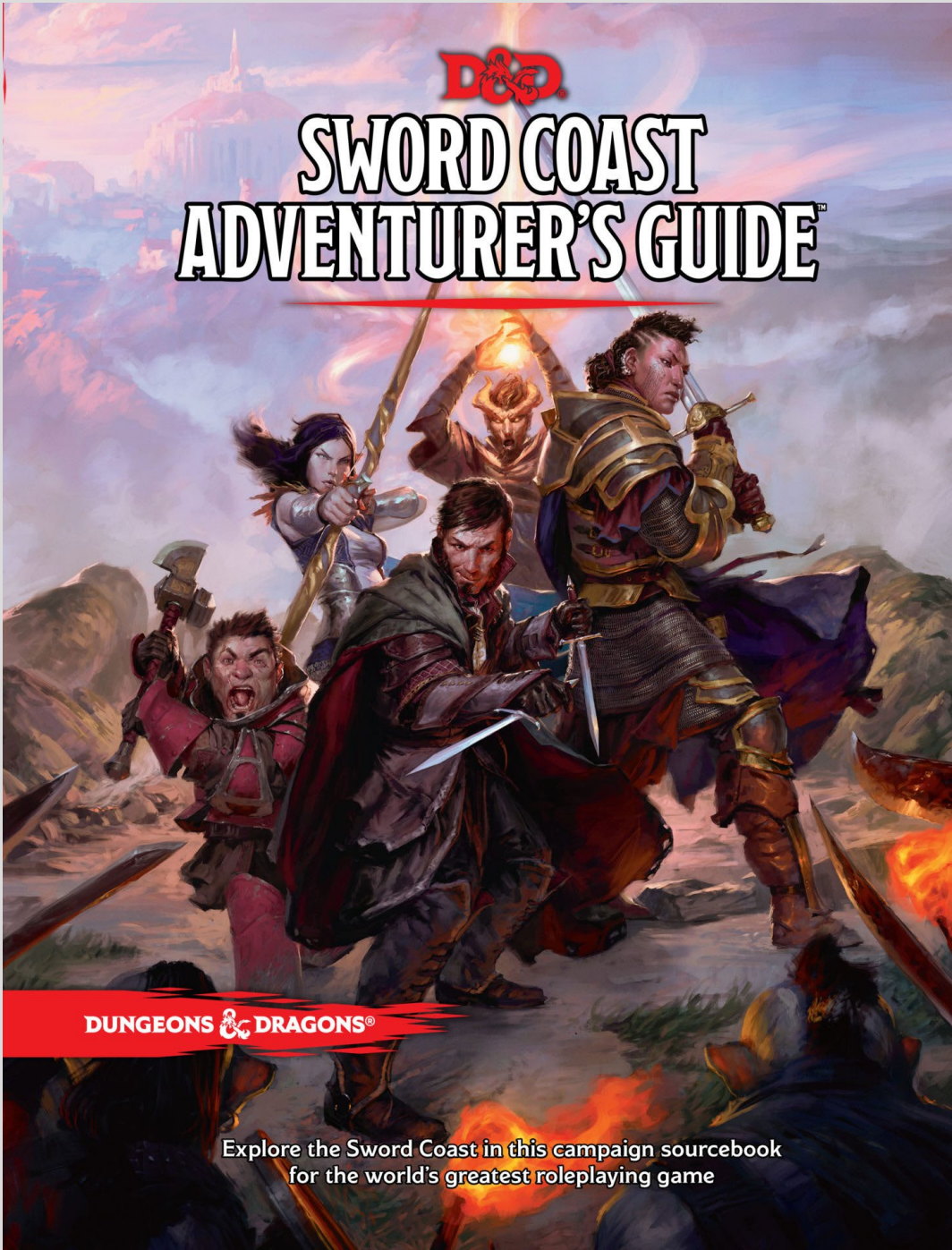
Horgar. These strong, no-nonsense soldiers take their business very seriously and you can spot a Stoneguard member by their King's Blade: a short sword with a serrated edge and the face of Horgar V on the pommel.

Unlucky adventurers may even encounter duergar riding a kind of giant tarantula, as these resourceful dwarves make use of what their environment provides. These Steeder riders can walk on walls and ceilings using the giant spiders' sticky appendages, jumping up to 240 feet to greet foes with a poisonous bite from their steeds.

Turner continues to be fascinated by these unusual underground dwellers and believes their integration into *Sword Coast Legends* offers a unique element to that videogame. "They're unlike all the other very passionate races, such as very honor-bound people like the dwarves or moustache twirling evil villains like the drow," he enthuses. "I find them compelling in that they're very different."

To learn more about the duergar, and other races of Faerûn, see the [Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide](#).





D&D

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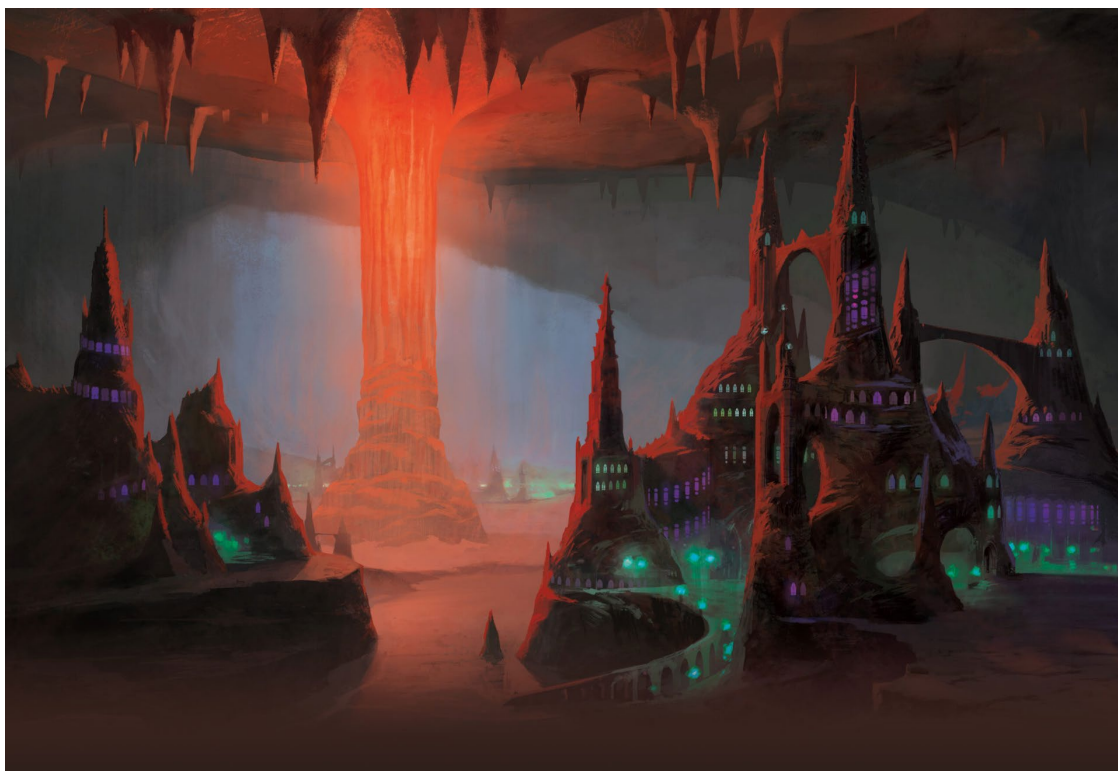
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Travel Talk: Dare to Descend

Writer Melisande Calador dared to descend into one of the most inhospitable regions in Faerûn to bring you news of its sights, smells and fungal delights.

Come ‘glamping’, they said. It’ll be fun, they said. Having never been gladiatorial camping before, it sounded like the perfect activity; living in relative simplicity while testing oneself against the fauna and flora of an environment. Then they told me the location: the Underdark. I’m not ashamed to say a little shudder ran down my spine.

“Are you afraid of drow, stone giants and beholders?” my guide, who we’ll call Bemril to protect his identity, asked? “No,” I replied, assuming this was some kind of test. “Well then there’s nothing to fear from the illithids because there’s barely a snack between your ears,” he fired back with a grin. I could already tell this was going to be an interesting trip.

GAUNTLGRYM



Our trip didn't take us near the shield dwarf kingdom but reports suggest if we were to make a second trip into the Underdark (which is a big if), Gauntlgrym would be well worth a visit. Its warded mithral doors and Iron Tabernacle (the latter often referred to as the greatest shrine to the dwarven god Moradin in the Underdark) have been the stuff of legend for centuries.

For those who've never heard the tall tales told in a tavern (try saying that ten times quickly), the Underdark is a deadly, subterranean realm inhabited by the most dangerous monsters known to human, elf, dwarf... you get the idea. When the Order of the Gauntlet uses a location as a proving ground for candidates, as it does with the Underdark, it's chock full of evil to smite. It's certainly no place for the weak, and even seasoned adventurers must use all their wits and skill to survive its depths.

Right from the off, as I collected my belongings, stowed my bedroll and checked my rations (including a little package of spices on the suggestion of the only other person I know who's ever visited the Underdark and lived to tell the tale), it was obvious this was no ordinary assignment. There was a problem with another member of the group; a Zhentarim mercenary called Kralar, whose build definitely matched the description 'muscle'. He had chosen the last minute to haggle over fees, claiming that the Underdark was currently even more dangerous than usual. Not wanting to make the trip a man short, he and our guide eventually struck a deal, although the previously smiling Bemril looked decidedly worried by the conversation.



Still, following our perilous trek into the darkness I'd been promised

the opportunity to shop at one of Faerûn's more unusual boutiques: the trading hub of Mantol-Derith. I'd have liked to visit the city of Menzoberranzan as well, especially as our leader Bemril was a drow. Sadly he deemed it too "treacherous" (not in the physical sense of the journey, but in the way most drow would feel compelled to sell us out as part of their culture). It's not the only place that was out of bounds. While Bemril felt he might be able to make the necessary arrangements to get us into the duergar city of Gracklstugh, he was more than a little worried we'd leave with far fewer party members than we arrived with. "How else do you think they feed the dragon that stokes the city's fires?" he joked. At least I think it was a joke...



In The Eye Of The Beholder

As we made our descent, the inherently savage nature of the Underdark was immediately at odds with its beauty. Trudging miles beneath the surface and getting deeper and deeper, we saw twisting passageways, caverns etched with mysterious runes and bizarre architecture – possibly evidence of nameless civilizations that have come and gone.



A naturally occurring radiation known as the faerzress also makes this an interesting destination most surface dwellers will never witness (and it's not as if the Underdark inhabitants are going to describe it to them, as many don't believe the world above ground really exists). The unusual magical properties of the faerzress can create wonders that defy physics: from unusual rock formations to impossible, enormous spaces.

If you still think an adventure in the Underdark is like a trip into similar caves above ground, let me assure you, that's not the case. Whereas caves near Baldur's Gate offer little light as you head into their depths, their Underdark equivalents can be aglow from multiple sources. Splashes of fungi share their bioluminescence, crystals shine, magma blinds and even the faerzress itself may pulse with a magical glow to serve as a light source. If that sounds comforting, be aware that the darkness itself can still be so deep that it alone is enough to drive you mad in this unforgiving world. Perhaps that's why I began to see horrible visions amid the swirling shapes of the faerzress.



Creature Comforts

Camping in these environs and soaking up their sights was only one half of our ‘glamping’ experience. Not that it was really possible to forget the other half, as the gladiatorial nature of the trip exerted itself upon us with worrying regularity. Some encounters were self-explanatory, as naturally occurring critters such as swarms of bats or giant scorpions tested our mettle in their search for a feast. It’s when two cave trolls decked out in bone necklaces also decided we looked tasty, immediately following a tough battle with some rather nasty troglodytes, that I realized how easy it would be to get overconfident in this environment and be overpowered by the sheer volume of challengers. The fact that we saw wurm sign on numerous occasions but never actually encountered one was a huge relief.



As we plodded on, I couldn't help thinking that my monster hunting friend Bhric Kharas would be in his element here. I, on the other hand, prefer the roughest part of a journey to be an overenthusiastic bath-house worker with a pumice stone. Never was that comforting spa image clearer in my mind than when a huge, monstrous arachnid knocked our guide Bemril clean over my head and my childhood fear of spiders glued my feet to the floor. It's at that point our bodyguard Kralar earned the extra fee he had negotiated, as he blocked its advance and stood with his shield to its wall of eyes, holding it back almost singlehandedly and allowing the rest of the party to defeat the beast. I'm sure Bhric would find the behavior of these creatures unusual. Our spider foe didn't hide in the shadows and try to capture us stealthily; it ran headlong at us as if something even nastier had made it flee its hidey-hole.



Water Features

Weary as I was following our exertions, I finally started to take a shine to the Underdark as we got closer to Mantol-Derith. The cavern housing this clandestine trade hub seems to have been naturally formed by water from the nearby Darklake. It is filled with waterfalls and the rivers flowing beneath its floors help float cargo in and out. This hidden cave complex is where drow, duergar, svirfneblin, and surface folk meet to trade and all hatreds are put aside in the name of commerce and profit. Navigating secret doors and using softly spoken passwords to hold back battle-ready guards, Bemril smoothed our path toward this underground oasis.

On my way into the city my luck was also definitely changing, as I found a little bronze brooch, which was crude but interesting in its own way. It looked a little like a bear, only with dual heads and twisted arms that seemed to split off into two – I guess the artist wasn't very good at carving hands.



However, that luck didn't last for long as my least favorite property of the Underdark suddenly made its presence known for the first time, as a dull, underlying whisper began to undermine my confidence. I would dash ahead to corners to try and see where it was coming from, but it always managed to torment me by slipping away into silence as I approached. The funny thing is, everyone else pretended they couldn't hear it. Kralar appeared more unnerved by my need to find this whisperer than he had at the sight of the giant spider, although he kept his customary silence. Only Bemril tried to calm me: "Come on, let's see what the market has to offer," he said with a wink.

Though the taunting voices continued, the stalls offered a worthy distraction. In particular, the deep gnome wares offered by Gabble Dripskillet were amazing, comprising gems, minerals, trinkets, and gizmos. Even better, this accomplished svirfneblin chef shared some of her tasty Underdark cuisine with me, ladling out a hearty bowl of fish stew. It was the second best meal I had in the Underdark.



Shame this moment was spoiled by another voice, although this time at least I was able to identify it. As Gabble and I discussed a price for a particularly impressive red gem on her stall, a rather unpleasant drow by the name of Sirak from House Mazelor tried to outbid me. With anger suddenly bubbling up from within, in a way I've never experienced before, I threw my backpack on the ground, spilling its contents. Luckily Gabble spotted the pack of spices among its contents and knowing their worth in the Underdark, shooed Sirak away. It felt insanely satisfying to claim this gem and I held it as tightly in my fist as I could.



Lost And Found

What happened next is a bit of blur. Still captivated by the mysterious voices playing on the edge of my consciousness, I seem to have missed the rapid approach of a hoard of beings who can only be described as part hyena and part human. Clearly not visiting Mantol-Derith on a shopping trip, their presence caused traders to flee in a stampede away from them, while guards and fighters tried to make haste in the opposite direction. Standing in the center of this thoroughfare, the last thing I remember is a rather eager stone giant guard clouting me out of the way on his way to join the fight against the intruders.

When I awoke in a soft bed some time later, I felt much calmer than I had since our entrance to the Underdark's trading post. For one thing, the voices were gone. Sadly, so was my broach. Amazingly, balled up in my clenched fist was a curiously translucent red gem, which I had somehow managed to carry with me to wherever I now lay. If that was a surprise, it wasn't to be my last.

"You're awake!" said Bemril as he bounded into the room with a smile as wide as the Dessarin Hills. "We thought we'd lost you there for a while. "Kralar and the others?" I asked, but downcast eyes and a shake of the head were all I got in reply. "Come on, I think we can risk a brief stroll outside," he said, helping me up.

His words made me suddenly worry where we had ended up but there was one more shock I couldn't have predicted. Not only had we made it to the drow city of Menzoberranzan, a life-long dream of mine, we had taken refuge in Arach-Tinilith – the drow academy. If there's one way to cure yourself of arachnophobia, it seems, it's to emerge bloody and battered from a structure built to look like the body of a gigantic spider.

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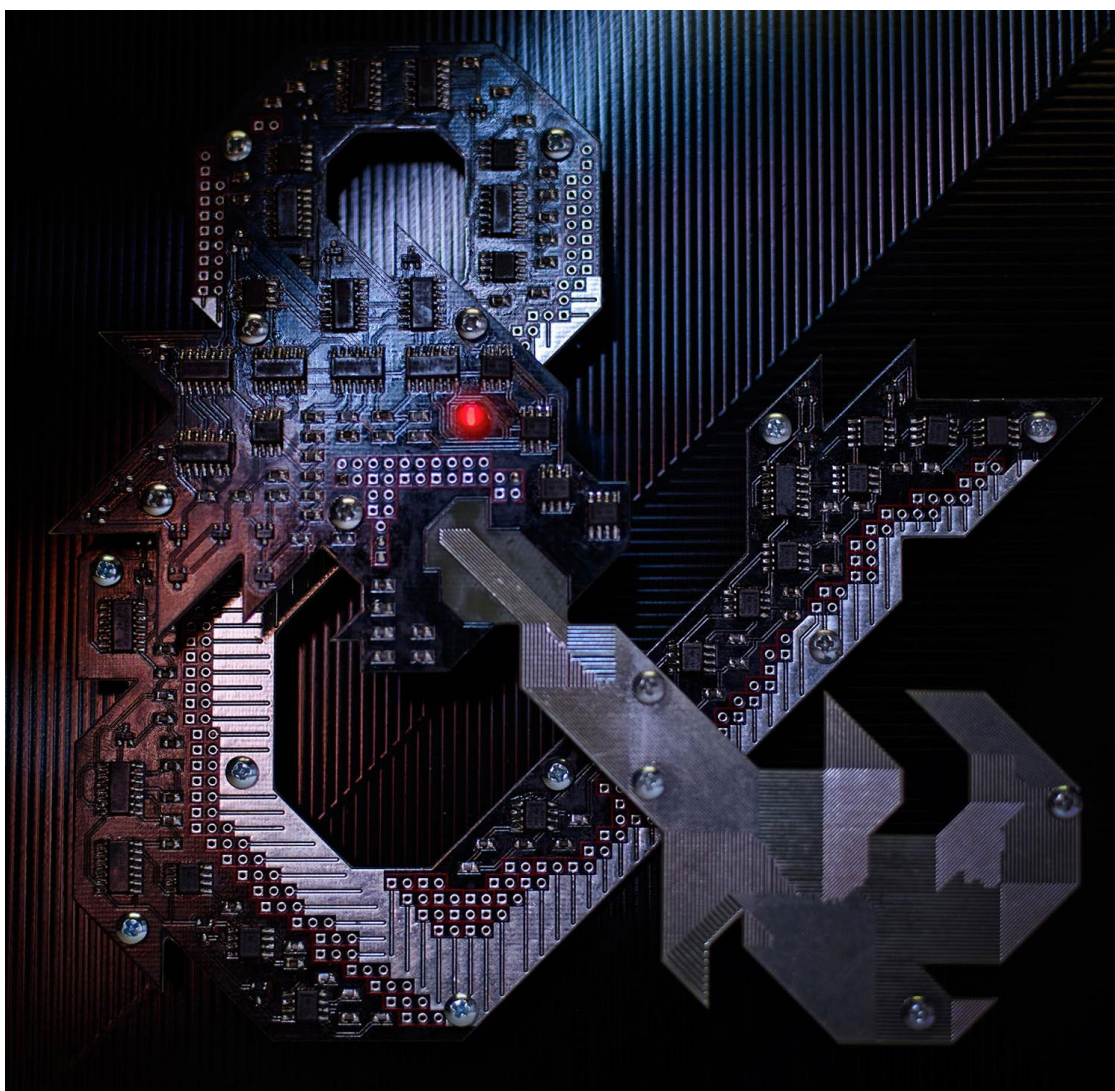
The artwork depicts a massive, multi-headed dragon-like creature with glowing red eyes and orange fire breathing from its mouths. The creature is set against a dark, cavernous background with blue and white light rays. In the foreground, several adventurers are visible: a paladin on the left in a red and white robe holding a bird, a character with long blonde hair in the center, and a knight in full plate armor on the right. The overall tone is dark and epic.

NEVERWINTER UNDERDARK

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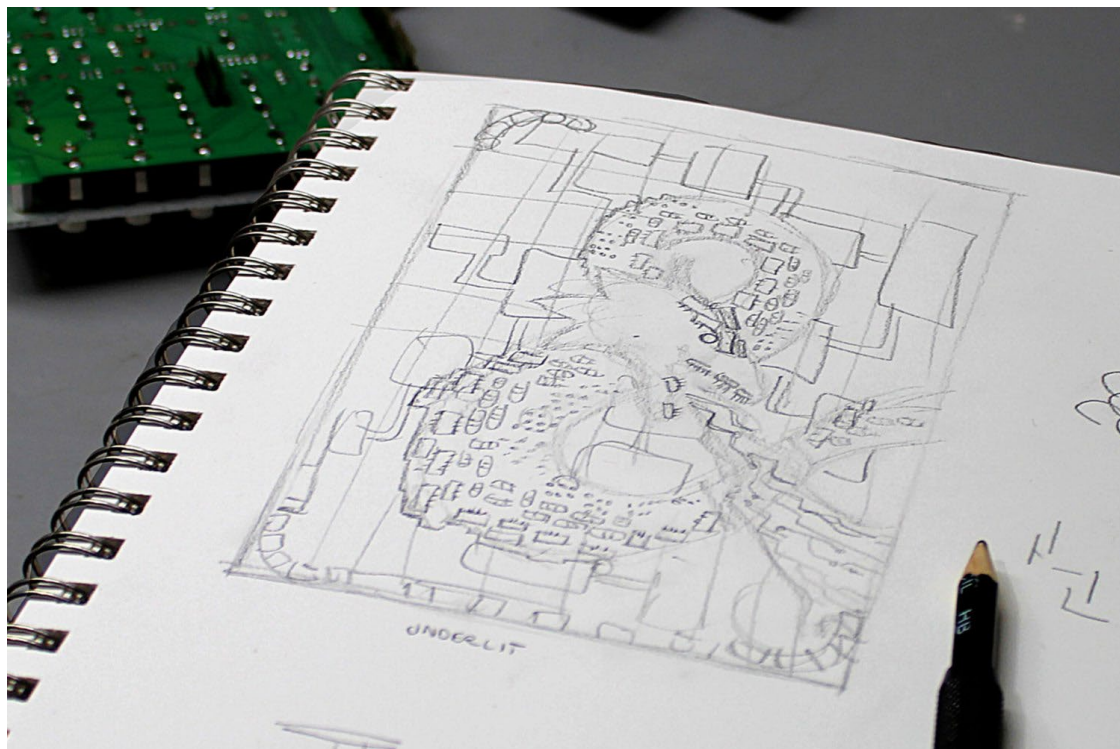
Imagining The Ampersand: Nick Bartoletti and Lars Larsen

Wizards of the Coast art director Nick Bartoletti joined forces with design engineer Lars Larsen of LZX Industries to create this issue's cover, an unconventional interpretation of the Dragon Ampersand.

You can't have missed the striking version of the D&D Dragon Ampersand that graces this month's cover, given its unusual artistic medium. Product design engineer **Lars Larsen** usually works

with printed circuit boards (PCBs) to create video synthesizers for LZX Industries. Wizards of the Coast's art director Nick Bartoletti tasked him with creating something with a little more bite, with a deadline to match. While the circuit board didn't have to carry out any computational functions, creating something aesthetically pleasing in that medium was a challenge.

"We only had about a month to make this," asks Bartoletti, "how long does it usually take LZX industries to create a circuit design that is functional?" "Typically I will have concepts and circuit snippets gestating in a research phase for months or even years," admits Larsen. "I've released LZX Industries products within a three-month timeframe before, but it can extend up to a year, or two."



(Select to view)

Larsen typically uses circuit simulation software to design a schematic, with most of the design work taking place in CAD software before a prototype is built. In the case of this sculpture, he skipped directly to the circuit board layout process.

"Board outlines are typically not as complex as the ones for this piece, but I wanted them to replicate the same aesthetic feel as the traces we're used to seeing that tell us we're looking at a circuit board. Deconstructing the Ampersand shape into more simple and

rigid ‘digital’ geometry was also an attempt to underline the design goals of creating an art piece about D&D in the modern age,” Larsen says. We’re very pleased with the results, and we hope you are too.

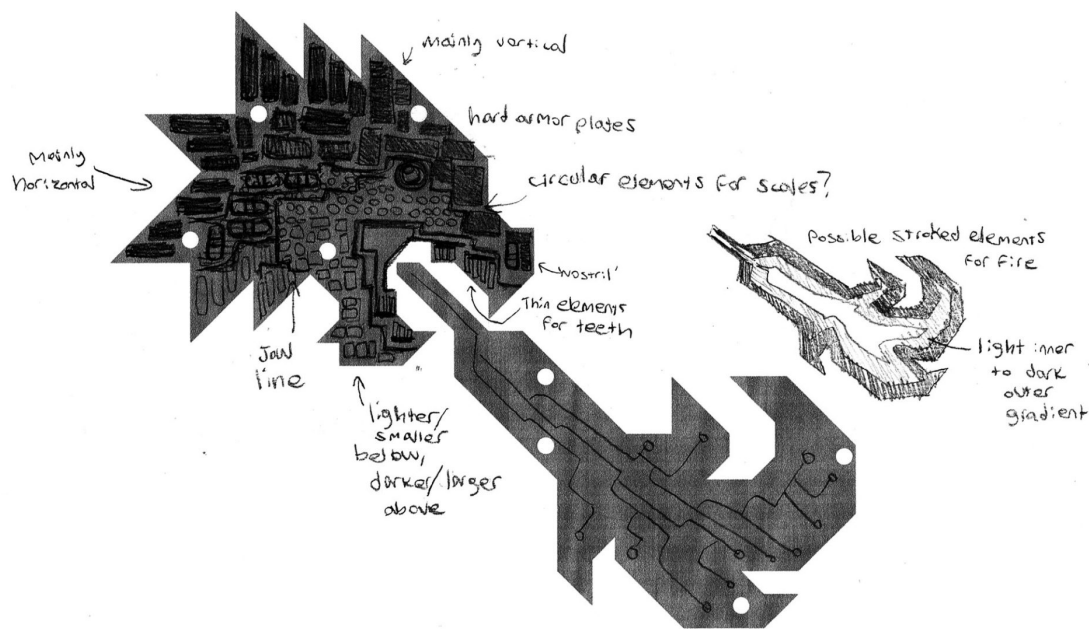
Nick Bartoletti: What’s your experience playing RPGs and D&D?

Lars Larsen: I started gaming at age 10, with Middle-earth Role Playing second edition, because my parents wouldn’t allow D&D at that time! I spent a good number of teenage years drawing maps and designing worlds for my campaigns, a source of inspiration which directly feeds into my fascination with designing electronic devices and routing circuit boards. Each device is its own little campaign world to create and explore.

I picked up gaming more heavily in my mid-20s, at the point when I realized all my other pursuits involved sitting in front of a computer. Since then, it’s been my go-to social and downtime activity, and I expect it always will be. I get bored with hobbies that do not involve some sort of creative and analytical process, and D&D does both for me inside the framework of an activity that is stress free and fun. I completely love fifth edition. I had gone back to playing the 1981 Basic/Expert set rules during the fourth edition years, and fifth edition has really pulled me back in.

This project was to essentially create a sculpture of modern electronic parts but still make it look functional. How did you find the balance between aesthetics and a perceived functionality?

I have a lot of mental processes and design rules that have become second nature after many years spent designing PCB layouts for electronics projects. For example, how close certain components should be placed to each other or which components should be parts of a circuit – a semiconductor usually has a nearby resistor and bypass capacitor. I worked with my concept artist, and dragon expert, Eric Koch to provide a rough guide on the aesthetic considerations of the layout, such as “blocky parts here, and little circles here,” and then placed parts on the layout as if the textured regions of the dragon’s body and head were just another list of electrical design requirements.



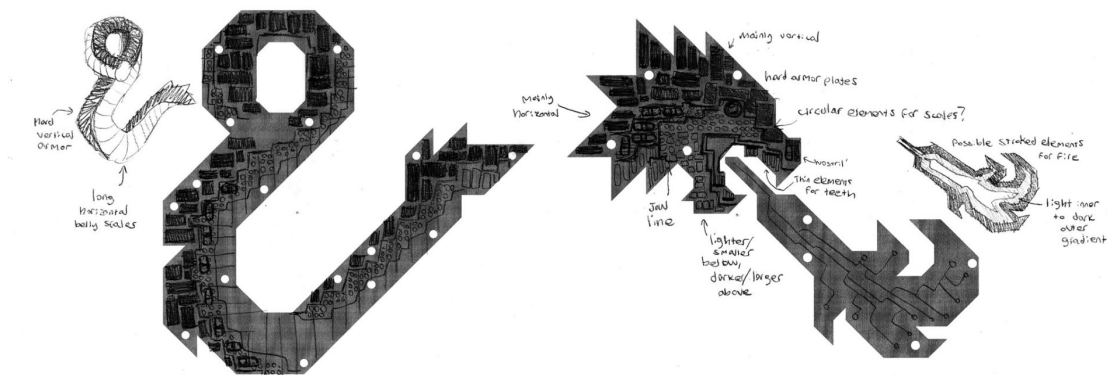
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What tools do you use to assemble PCB's?

A soldering iron with a cleaning sponge for the tip, high grade tweezers, a hot air rework tool, solder flux marker, copper desoldering braid for fixing mistakes. I have an inspection microscope I sometimes use as well.

Some of the parts are very small. What are the challenges that go into making modern electronic components?

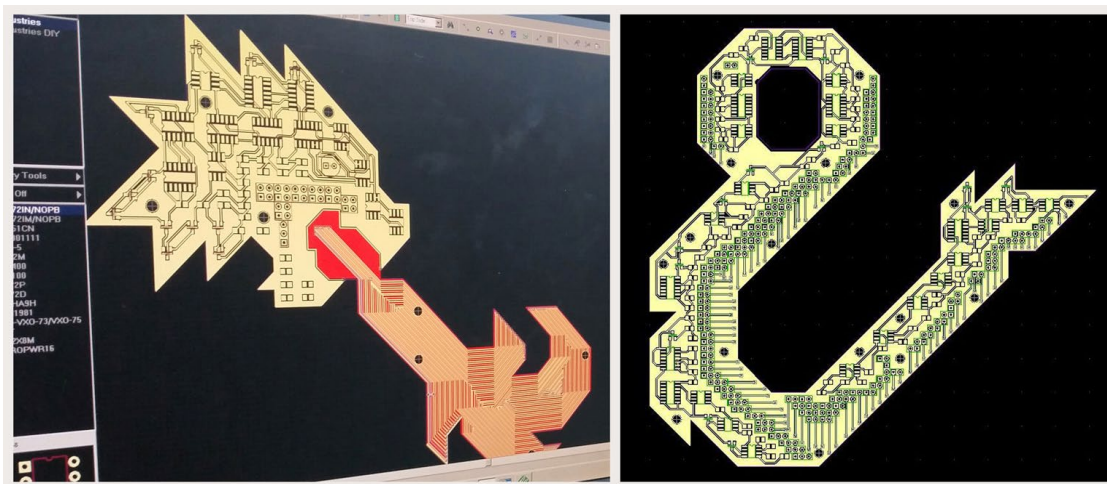
It's always less intimidating than it looks. In a manufacturing environment, boards like this are typically assembled robotically by pick-and-place machines. These machines have giant reels of all the components which need to be placed on the circuit board, and are programmed specifically for each job. In the case of this sculpture, I assembled all the parts by hand with a soldering iron and tweezers. Solder itself is more moldable than you might think. When I first placed all the components on the board, the results were very sloppy and parts were all off center. However, by applying soldering flux to the joints and using a hot air gun, the solder joints reflow and all the components center themselves on the circuit board footprints, creating a more uniform appearance. The best tool when doing this kind of work is very good lighting!



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What intentional features or techniques did you use to give it the modern and sleek look, as opposed to the green and copper circuits we are more accustomed to?

Circuit boards are made of a fiberglass substrate with a copper layer on one or both sides. The green look we're used to seeing is the typical color of the solder mask layer that is printed over the copper traces. This layer protects the electrical connections by sealing them. For this project, I chose a black solder mask rather than a green one, and a red silkscreen layer rather than the typical white one, for various placement markings on the board.



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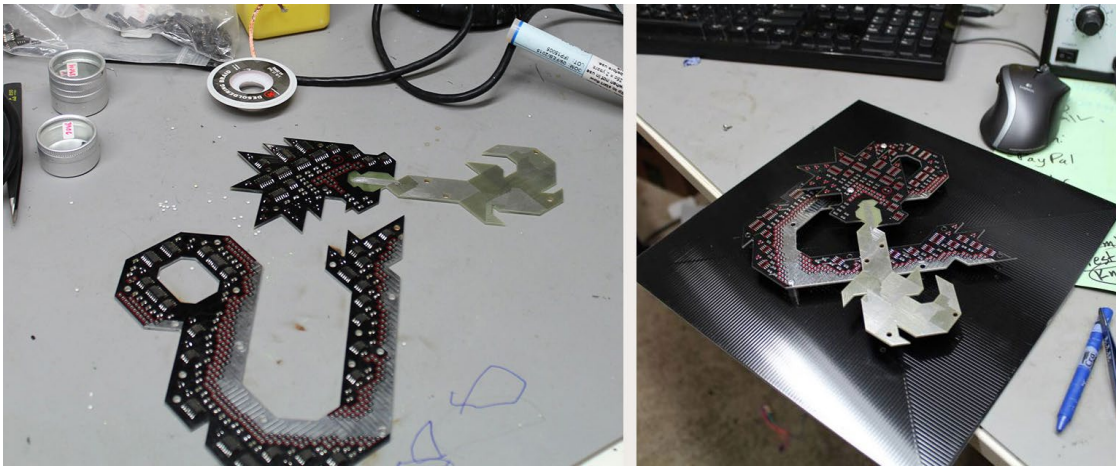
What chips and components did you use, and what functions would they serve if they were used on an actual PCB?

Since it was for a sculptural piece, I dug through my bags of prototyping parts and used whatever I had on hand. The parts used are TL074 quad op-amps, LM393 comparators, 49.9K ohm resistors and 2N3904 transistors. TL074 is very commonly used as a buffer and signal mixer in audio and general purpose applications. LM393 is

a comparator used to translate an analogue voltage into a binary value, high or low. The last time I used LM393 was in a design which turns an LED [Light Emitting Diode] indicator on or off, based on the level of an input signal.

What are some of the challenges you encounter when making circuits?

Product design engineering, like many other fields, is all about balancing various requirements: function, cost, quality, interface, aesthetics, efficiency, deadlines. In the case of this project, I had no electrical specifications to worry about and a generous budget, so I didn't waste any time worrying about how well the circuit worked, building a prototype to test it before manufacturing, or how expensive it would be to manufacture. That made this project a total joy, without all the usual headaches involved.



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What software do you use, and how do you choose where certain components go?

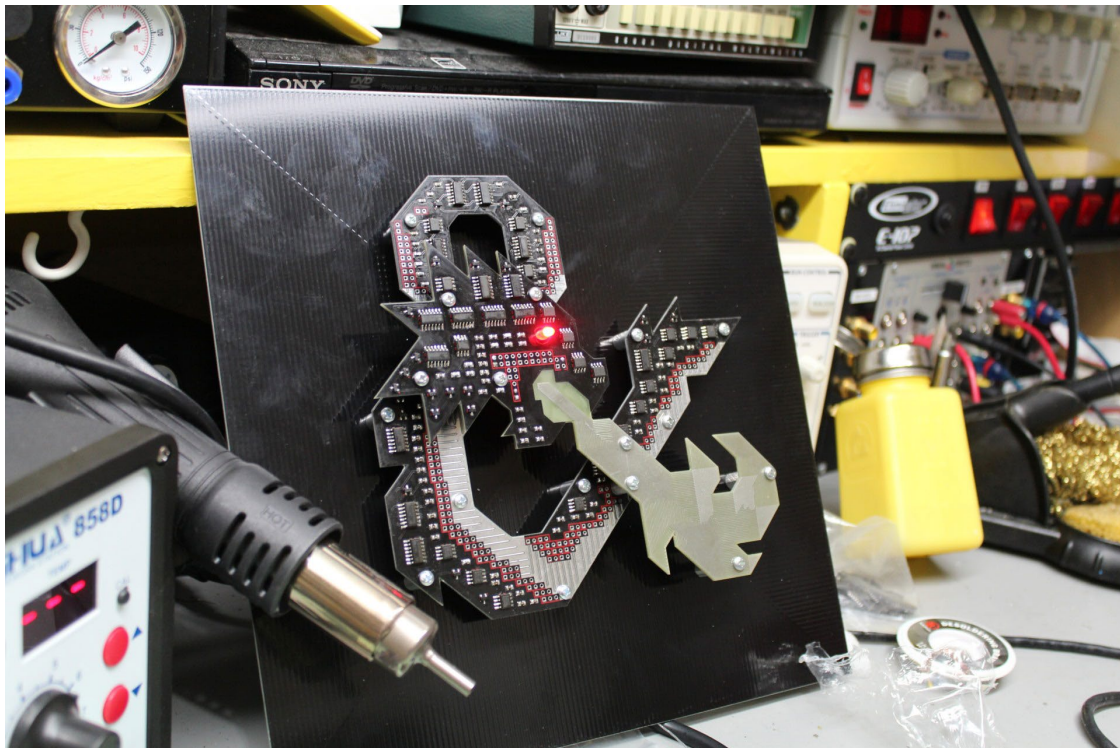
I recently started using Diptrace PCB for layouts, and I love it. In the past I have used CadSoft EAGLE. Both software packages have free versions, if you'd like to play around with them. In a typical design, I will draw a schematic of the circuit first. Then the PCB is created, components placed on it, and electrical connections routed out according to the schematic. In the case of this sculpture, I skipped straight to the PCB.

I imported an image of the D&D ampersand logo and drew over it in the CAD software to create the board outlines for each PCB, and then placed common footprints according to my concept artist's sketch. Once I placed the components, I routed the traces which connect

them all to each other so that it would look like a proper circuit, and drew specialized soldermask and copper pour layers.

What does it take to turn the design into an actual physical PCB?

When the design was finished, I exported gerbers [a universal cad format, for circuit board manufacturing] and a drill file. There is a separate gerber file for each layer of the circuit board: top copper; top soldermask; top silkscreen; etc. The drill file provides instructions for where holes need to be drilled on the board, and what size to drill them. These files are packaged up and sent to a PCB fabrication service, who then provide a quote for the cost of the finished board. After submitting my files and paying for the order, it took a week to receive the finished PCBs in the mail.



(Select to view)

Are there any other examples in the world where a custom electronic component was made purely for sculptural purposes?

There are a few artists I know of, such as Peter McFarlane. What makes this piece unique for me is that it was designed to look functional and followed the same work process as an electronics product design. It is more like a movie prop in that sense, and invokes a sense of wonder as a result.

To learn more about LZX industries, visit the company's [website](#).



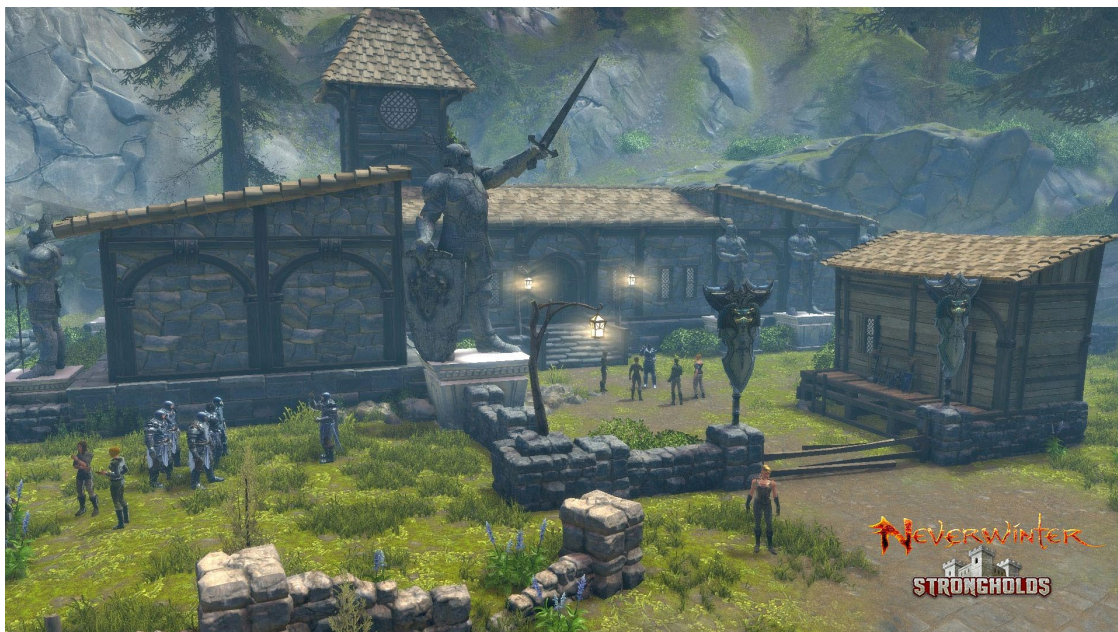
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Neverwinter Strongholds

Neverwinter the free-to-play MMORPG allowed guilds to build their own keeps, now with Strongholds Siege they must protect them from invading guilds. Matt Chapman learns the secrets to a successful siege campaign.

The seventh major update for the free-to-play *Neverwinter* MMORPG focused on guild halls, allowing groups to take control of their own settlements. Having flushed out the monsters and claimed an abandoned keep from the wild, these guilds had to build them back up into their former glory.



Yet what's the fun of having your own guild hall if there's no-one to challenge your control? The player-versus-player (PVP) element of *Neverwinter: Strongholds* allows guilds to face off against each other, building up defenses to fend off the attackers while storming an opponents' structure using siege weaponry. *Dragon+* spoke to John Hopley, senior content designer at Cryptic Studios, to get some winning advice on *Strongholds*' 20-versus-20 PVP experience.

How does a guild initiate PVP?

You just queue up as a group. The whole system works off that queue and it'll match you with another guild and load both sides onto the map.

Is there clever stuff happening in the background, where it thinks, 'this group is similar to this group'?

The match maker does track the scores over the games that have been played. So at first it will be more random but as people play more matches it will try and pit you against guilds that have had similar performance, to give you a good match.

Obviously you have to opt in and join that queue. So no-one can just wander into your territory when you're not online and attack your castle?

No. Your PVE [player-vs-environment] castle is separate and only guild members can get to it.



If I have less than 20 people in my guild, do I limit the other guild's invaders to below 20?

If groups smaller than 20 join the queue, they actually get combined together to form a full 20-player team. Generally what happens is that the largest guild on that team gets to use its buildings for that match.

Do the structures people have built in PVE factor into the PVP matches?

On the guild PVE map you can build all kinds of things, like mines, barracks and farms. When your guild goes into a match, everything you've built on that PVE map is present on the PVP map.

So if I've added structures such as archery towers, they will aid me during PVP?

Right now there are archery and sorcery towers you can build and those will actually be on the map during the match and they will fire on enemy players. You can also build a siege smithy and a siege workshop that will increase the effectiveness of the catapults and ballistae you can build on the map.



Can the enemy loot farms or interact with other features?

You can actually damage all of the PVE buildings. We wanted all of those production buildings such as farms to have an impact on the match. You spend supplies to do things like build catapults and ballistae and make ammunition, and all of these production buildings generate supplies during the PVP match. Each location will generate a pack horse periodically that's loaded down with supplies. You can run over to get that and either send it back to your guild hall, or tell the pack horse to follow you and drag it around to where you need it. And if you go into the enemy's territory you can steal their horses – if you kill an enemy player who is leading a horse, you can take the animal as your own. So there is raiding-type stuff you can do.

And that gives you more to protect, rather than focusing solely on the keep?

Exactly. We wanted to give you reason to play the entire map and not just concentrate on a few areas.

Do all Neverwinter players enjoy PVP or does this appeal to a certain type of player?

Our *Domination* PVP has a pretty good following but we wanted to tempt some of those players who are a little more hesitant about it into PVP. That's why we wanted to provide a lot of things you can do on the map to contribute to victory. You don't have to be a murder machine, you can go around and collect the horses up, build the catapults, things like that – all of which contributes to your side without you being the best PVP player ever.

Are players in danger of being looted if they get killed? Or do they respawn again with their equipment intact?

They respawn back in their guild hall, in the courtyard where it's safe. If they were collecting supplies or they had been collecting gold for the dragon, when they die they actually drop all of that and the enemy player can pick it up.



So players won't lose their favorite weapon or armor?

You don't lose anything and none of the things that get blown up on the PVP map carry back over to your PVE map. We didn't want to punish people for participating. Everybody gets rewards, although obviously the victors get more of the spoils.

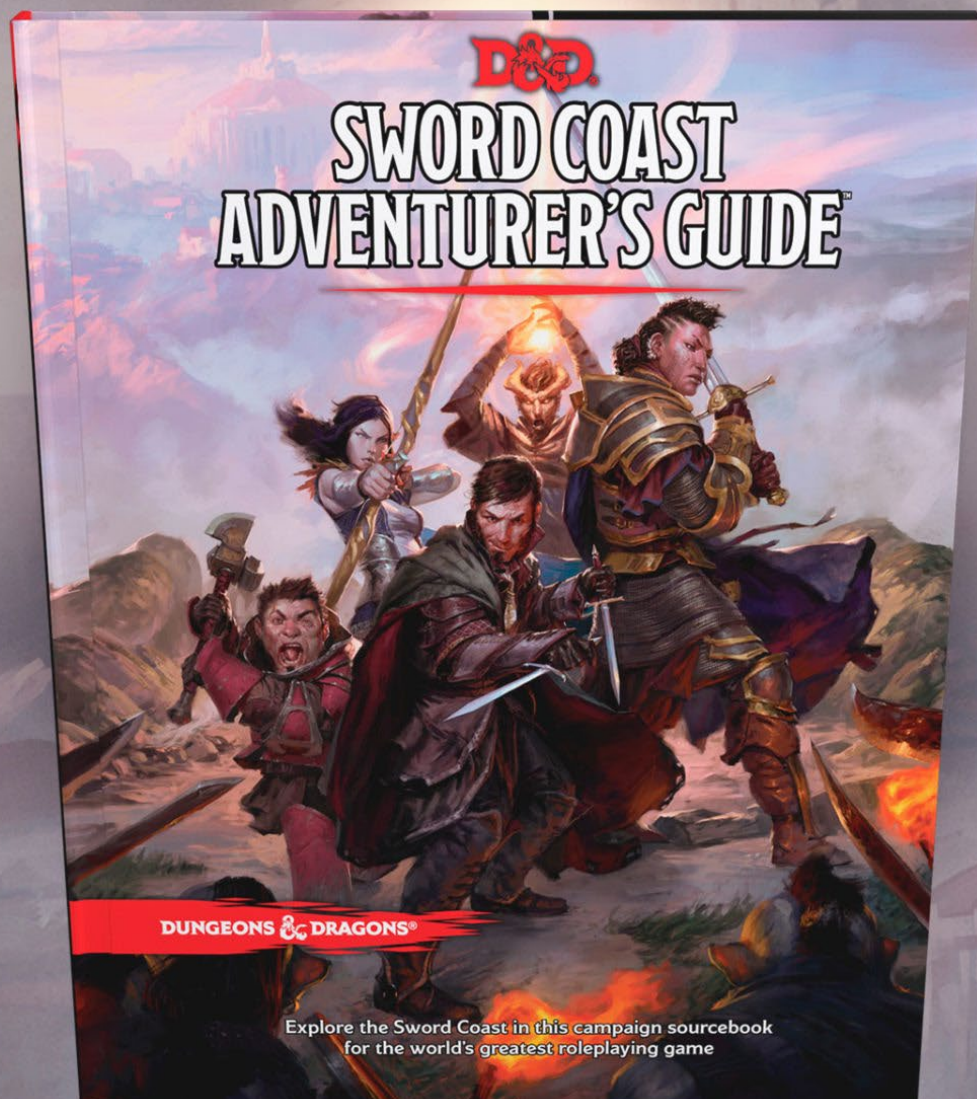
On the map there are three routes into a keep...

The structure of the map is a three-lane setup, where you have a top, middle and bottom lane, which all connect the two castles.

Is that to give people different routes in, rather than open ground they might just charge across?

We wanted to avoid it just turning into a giant brawl in the center of the map and whoever wins that fight takes the map. The three lanes force players to prioritize one or two routes and to defend the other location, which spreads the players out a little bit.

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ENLIST YOUR ALLIES!

YOU'RE GOING TO NEED ALL THE HELP YOU CAN GET.

Loaded with new character options, the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide* expands on the core rules while immersing you in Forgotten Realms lore.

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Demonomicon of Iggwilv: Belaphoss, Devourer of Hope

The true nature of Demogorgon's chief warlord is revealed in pages torn from the infamous wizard's writings...

Belaphoss the Mad is an ancient and powerful balor with ambitions to godhood. Called the Left Hand of Demogorgon, the Devourer of Hope, and the Warlord of the Gibbering Hordes, he has long waged war across the Abyss.

As a lieutenant of Demogorgon, Belaphoss commands significant demon armies and demands loyalty from all his servants. As crafty as he is powerful, he often masquerades as a devil or a benign spirit to lure mortals into pacts designed to fulfil his own plans—after which he betrays his unwitting followers at his own whim. Belaphoss often gathers such servants through dreams and nightmares, using them to set his centuries-old plans into motion.

Belaphoss styles himself more civilized and cunning than other balors. He has served Demogorgon for eons, leading the hordes of the Prince of Demons into battle against the armies of Graz'zt and Orcus. However, this service has all been part of a calculated plan to one day turn against Demogorgon—and become lord of the Gaping Maw in his stead.

The demon Belaphoss is a multihorned balor who wields a deadly weapon: a greataxe wreathed in flame that has a flaming whip attached to the base of its haft.

Belaphoss's Lair

Belaphoss's lair is in the Gaping Maw—the abyssal layer that is home to Demogorgon. As a lieutenant of Demogorgon, Belaphoss controls countless minions of the Prince of Demons. His lair is a realm of chaos and duplicity, where he encourages those beneath him to rise among the ranks in whatever way possible, short of challenging his dominion. Those that do challenge the balor find their advancement halted—normally in a prolonged and torturous manner.

D100	FLAW (LASTS UNTIL CURED)
01-20	"I care not for others; my mad goals are all that matters."
21-40	"This world would look better with a bit more chaos mixed in, and I'm the perfect person to introduce it."
41-60	"If anyone even looks at me wrong, I'll cut them down!"
61-80	"I'm terrified of sleep. Sleep is when I die. Sleep is when I do terrible things. Sleep is when the nightmares come..."
81-100	"I have an undeniable urge to study all things demonic. Lore, rumors, magic—I need it all."

(Select to view)

Madness of Belaphoss

If a creature goes mad in Belaphoss's lair or within line of sight of the demon, roll on the Madness of Belaphoss table to determine the nature of the madness, which is a character flaw that lasts until cured. See the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more on madness.

Belaphoss

Huge fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 262 (21d12 + 126)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Str +14, Con +12, Wis +9, Cha +12

Damage Resistances cold, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)

Death Throes. When Belaphoss dies, he explodes, and each creature within 30 feet of him must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 70 (20d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The explosion ignites flammable objects in that area that aren't being worn or carried, and it destroys Belaphoss's weapon.

Fire Aura. At the start of each of Belaphoss's turns, each creature within 5 feet of him takes 10 (3d6) fire damage, and flammable objects in the aura that aren't being worn or carried ignite. A creature that touches Belaphoss or hits him with a melee attack while within 5 feet of him takes 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Magic Resistance. Belaphoss has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Belaphoss's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. Belaphoss makes two attacks: one with his greataxe and one with his whip.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (3d10 + 8) slashing damage plus 13 (3d8) fire damage. If Belaphoss scores a critical hit, he rolls damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 25 feet toward Belaphoss.

Abyssal Storm (Recharge 5–6). Belaphoss surrounds himself with explosive fire that fills a 30-foot sphere centered on him and spreads around corners. Each creature in the fire must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage and 28 (8d6) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Belaphoss is immune to this damage. Objects in the area are subject to it, and the fire ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried.

Teleport. Belaphoss magically teleports, along with any equipment he is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

Winged Barrage. Belaphoss beats his wings. Each creature in a 20-foot cube originating from him must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a target takes 29 (6d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 20 feet away from Belaphoss. On a success, the target takes half the bludgeoning damage and isn't pushed. Belaphoss can then fly up to half his flying speed.

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Fiction: The Thweem

Wherein I encounter the thweem, infused with the rage of demon lords, and unwittingly succumb to its madness.

Story by Chris Perkins, written by Adam Lee

My life was a simple one. A subtle, sensory experience within the cloister that I called home. The beings around me were gentle, and even though we lived within a harsh world, we never became harsh ourselves. We sought only peace and took only what we needed. Most didn't even know we existed, and those that did, being far too preoccupied with their own ambitions, found us too insignificant to care about.

The Underdark creates a hardness within its denizens, yet it is our home, too. I suppose we are an anomaly within it, immune to the

Underdark's pressures to adopt a mantle of evil.

But one day there was a great disturbance. A vibration sliced through the Underdark like a scream. We in the cloister could feel its tortured and malevolent frequency move throughout the caverns and tunnels. Over time, whatever had been released in that wave of energy had affected the creatures who lived in the Underdark. We could feel their confusion, their fear, their madness. We had to move away, as far from any other beings as we could. We could hear their thoughts, feel their emotions. They had become unstable, dangerous. We felt the great disturbance had somehow triggered it.

We huddled together, high up on a ledge, where we couldn't feel any other beings, only the dull hum of the thweem tingled as it swirled among us. We wondered what had happened, and why other creatures had been affected so.

That's when I first felt it.

It was as if some subtle disturbance had entered my body. An uncomfortable vortex of energy that rumbled within me. It stimulated my thoughts, memories, and emotions. It did not feel good.

Then it was gone.

I thought no more of it and went about my daily life, but from time to time I would experience this strange disturbance. It was as if a heaviness invaded my being. I would push it to the back of my mind but it would force its way into my consciousness and begin to take over my perceptions. I would feel disconnected from the cloister. I became grumpy and easily hurt. On several occasions I lashed out. Gradually, I took to the edges of the cloister, and moved farther and farther away.

One day, I felt especially uneasy. I had been wandering in the thweem, lost in thought, when the disturbance surged up within me again. This time, I felt a dark presence that was me and not me at the same time. I became afraid and rushed back to the security of the cloister. As I rejoined my friends, I could not shake the memory of the experience. It had left a mark. The cloister could sense it, I could feel the others' minds as they touched me with concern.

Then it came again, a rush of irritation that burned down my tentacles. I knew the cloister could feel my strangeness. They stared at me, their eyestalks waving about with mild apprehension. I could feel them beginning to chatter about me.

What's wrong with him?

Where were you?

Why were you in the thweem ?

It was too crowded. My skin began to crawl. I moved to get to the edge of the cloister. I needed to get away. I wished they would shut up and leave me alone, but Globadoo kept getting in my way, asking me endless dumb questions.

Are you all right? What's wrong? Where are you going? What are you doing?

I tried maneuvering around him but he grew increasingly confused and flustered, making a bunch of confused and flustered sounds: Oh! Uh, ah? Huh? Whaaa?

The more I tried to get by him, the more it caused his eyestalks and tentacles to tangle with mine.

The cloister could feel my disturbance boiling up like a pool of sulfurous magma. I wanted to shove Globadoo away. He was always such a nuisance. Always getting tangled up, fumbling and flapping about like a flarging idiot.

My skin turned red and puckered into spikes. I couldn't help it. Rage had infused my being.

Get out of my way, you moron! I shoved Globadoo hard. It felt amazing.

He flew across the cavern, making a satisfying FRAAAAAP! noise that was cut short when he hit the rock wall. His defensive stench jets reactively purged, spraying everyone with a foul odor that was unique to him. It was awful and the cloister scattered in various directions.

Globadoo turned gray with horror when he saw what had happened. The cloister shook with alarm, their eyestalks waved about and looked at me like I was some rabid quaggoth. Globadoo was still in shock.

What is wrong with you, Freemo? Bluubo asked.

I'll tell you what's wrong, you're all a bunch of useless idiots! I lashed out. Words were extensions of the disturbance now, and it wanted to do damage.

I could feel my thoughts and emotions hit them like a hammer. In the dark gloom of the luminescent fungi, all I saw were dozens of innocent eyes looking at me with disbelief. Their thought-field buzzed with dismay. They were not used to one of their own behaving in such a manner.

You've been acting very strange lately, Freemo. Gleeb, the master of the obvious, stated.

What has happened? You don't look well. Algy's skin rippled with a deep, purple concern.

I was about to retort again when the feeling of rage drained from me like water until there was no fuel left in my furnace.

Then I felt bad.

Sadness welled up within. I turned blue. My tentacles hung limp with shame.

I . . . I don't know what happened. You're my friends and I . . . I looked at them, huddled in the cavern. I had caused this terrible shock. Guilt flooded my being and I was filled with its heavy, syrupy misery. I must have turned the worst color ever. I felt awful.

Are you sick? Globadoo reached out a tentacle.

I . . . I must be. It had felt like a sickness. A sickness of my mind—no, a sickness of my soul. I have to get away from all of you. This has been happening for a while and it is getting worse. It could happen again. I . . . I could infect the cloister, I said.

You are vulnerable alone. It is not our wish. Let us take care of you, Algy said.

The cloister rippled with agreement. I could feel their kindness, and it just made me feel worse. The memory of what had happened plagued me. I felt I was no longer a part of the cloister. I was not good enough to be around them.

The cloister could feel me. You can never be apart from us. We are your home, Freemo. You know this. But I had done something terrible. I was bad.

I must go away and get better. I cannot live with you if I am to be like that again.

I turned and left. I knew that I could possibly have some contagion, but truthfully all I wanted was to be alone. I felt I could never be forgiven for such a cruel outburst.

Come back soon, Freemo, Algy's mind called out amid the shimmering thoughts of the cloister. I knew they all agreed with him but it didn't take away the pain. As I moved down the tunnel and into the darkness, his mind called out once more. We will be waiting.



I wandered aimlessly, for how long I do not know, when the madness arose within me again.

I was surprised. There was nothing at all to be irritated at, only the scuttling of blind vermin in the dim glow of the thweem, but for some unknown reason, the disturbance began to conjure up memories of the encounter with Globadoo again and again. Each successive time the memory was relived, the experience of it redoubled my irritation, and I could feel my tendrils as they coiled with tension. I began to react to the replay in my mind's eye.

I should have shoved that moron harder. I should have shoved Algy too, that obsequious snob, always butting his bell into everyone's business, flapping his damn flapper like some spore-addled flerb. Words and images flooded into my mind. I made up scenes where I tied Globadoo's tentacles in knots and flipped Algy upside down.

I said all the bad words I could think of. I was infuriated.

And I was totally alone.

I looked around, my skin was flushed scarlet with anger. Then the rage drained from me again, and my mind cleared.

I was alone in a cold, dark cavern, being driven mad by my own memories.

What is happening to me? I shook and slapped myself, which helped, but I still felt the physical effects of my imagined conflict. It was as if the rage had become embedded in my tissues.

Had I been possessed by some malevolent force? Surely I would have detected psychic energy if it had been an aboleth or some other nearby entity. I was afraid. What if I was going mad?

I wandered a long time. I was lost, tired. I didn't want to think anymore.

But then I noticed something. I had wandered into an area thick with thweem. Was there a connection? I knew the great magi of the drow used the thweem to enhance their spells, of course they called it the Faerzress. Every time I had felt this rage arise within me and take over my mind with thoughts and emotions, I had been in or near a patch of thweem.

I darted out of the luminous, swirling energy of the thweem as if it was a deadly poison gas. I must alert the cloister. The thweem had somehow become contaminated.

That's when I felt a cry for help.



I knew before I even got there that mind flayers had been the cause of the creature's pain and misery. They had found a victim. I could feel their psychic energy as it buzzed about with eager anticipation. Brains were being evaluated, human brains.

Humans are out of place in our world. I don't understand why they come here, because the images that flash through their minds are

wondrous. They come from a place of dazzling light and color where there is no ceiling or walls. They stand on a verdant floor covered with myriad varieties of plant life, and above them is an infinite space filled with glorious blue light. When they come to the Underdark for any amount of time, they long for the source of this light, this sunshine, as they call it. They have busy minds and are preoccupied with their own thoughts, much like the illithids, but everything about illithids is repugnant. They are single-minded predators whose voracious intellect is firmly rooted in the service of evil.

I floated silently for the area where the humans were helplessly caught within the mental clutches of the mind flayers.

I could not abide this torture.

I floated upward, as high as I could, and stuck to the tunnel wall that eventually turned from rough rock into the smooth, sinuous patterns unique to illithid architecture, which I always found to be deeply unsettling. I molded my shape as closely as I could to its curves and moved with slow precision. I shrouded my thoughts and made my mind as still as the lakes within the Everdepths.

Two humans were shackled to chains that hung from the ceiling amid a clutch of mind flayers. Like all sentient beings, the humans suffered terribly from the evaluation and were pleading to powerful spiritual beings who dwell in some invisible space for deliverance from their captors. They sought comfort, as do we all in times of pain. I could not abandon them.

The illithids made guttural utterances to one another in deep speech. The rubbery skin of their heads subtly changed texture and color while their purplish tentacles caressed the faces and heads of their victims, who recoiled and winced in psychic pain. It was difficult to observe.

Is that all there is? Is there more? The illithids psychically inquired with soulless intensity as they swarmed through every nook and cranny of the humans' minds. They were driven by an insatiable hunger to know more, and their lack of hesitancy was frightening. They exercised no delicacy in their task. I could feel their will and mental power as it overwhelmed and dominated their hapless victims, who sank like overburdened rothé into quicksand.

I felt helpless, and watched as the humans sank ever more deeply into mental oblivion.

Then a command came, a psychic command that demanded absolute fealty: Return to me, now.

The mind flayers detached their tentacles with emotionless obedience and left the room. Their inquiry-feast would have to wait.

But I wouldn't.

I moved as fast as I could, for I knew once the humans saw me, their excitement would instantly give me away. Humans rarely understood their psychic energy, and how even the subtlest ripple is perceived by sensitive beings. Most human minds are loud and clumsy, like a quaggoth after eating a ring of jabbercaps. I hoped they wouldn't spot me.

I floated down, and took great care to be silent as I wrapped myself around the iron manacles that held one of them captive. I squeezed every muscle I could, and forced as much acid as possible out of my tentacles onto the iron. The manacles began to sizzle and smoke. I tried not to get any acid on the human's wrists, but a small amount dripped onto his arm and yanked him out of his delirium. That's when he knew I was there. He yelped and looked at me with alarm. His friend appeared concerned and then recognized that my intentions were good.

As expected, their thoughts blasted out like a thousand ringing bells.

"Hold still," the other human said to her friend as she radiated hope, "it's helping us."

It wasn't long before the first human broke free. He scrambled, still in a daze from the mind flayer's psychic probing, and grabbed his sword. Urgency rushed through him as he then looked for anything to free his friend—keys, a thin piece of metal—while I wrapped myself around the other human's manacles. I had a small bit of acid left. I hoped it was enough. I could sense the mind flayers coming like a swarm of cavern hornets.

"It's working!" the human said as she worked her wrists in the

manacles. The iron began to twist and tear where the acid ate into it. Her friend, unable to find anything useful, sheathed his sword, grabbed the manacles with his bare hands, and tore into them. Just as his friend broke free he looked over his shoulder to the tunnel through which the mind flayers had left. Then he looked at me.

“What is that thing?” he whispered, wiping his hands free of acid on the wet, stone floor.

“I forget their name, but they’re good,” the woman whispered as she washed her wrists in the puddles. She looked around the dimly lit room. “How do we get out of here?”

I could feel the mind flayers coming, and they weren’t happy.

Leave through that tunnel. I sent the image of the tunnel I had come through into their minds. I showed them my memories: how I got here, side tunnels, traverses, everything they needed to escape without notice. It was a fairly detailed account of my memories, and the humans were startled. I could see they were not used to telepathic experiences because they brought their hands up to their heads and struggled to maintain their balance.

After my transmission was complete the man said, “It’s a damn trick.” He was the older of the two and had suffered many wrongs in his past. “More illithid mind games.”

“No. It’s all right. That’s how they communicate. The Mystic says you can trust these little guys,” the woman said to her friend. She had read many books and her mind was curious and determined.

“Let’s get the hell out of here, then.” The humans ran off, and I felt a wave of relief flood over me. I had helped them escape and it felt good.

Then the mind flayers barged into the room, their tentacles wriggling with outrage.

I discharged every bit of noxious stench juice I had within each one of my fleeb glands, and propelled myself to the ceiling. The mind flayers recoiled. Their fleshy, membranous skin was extremely sensitive and felt my noxious toxins with intense clarity. They

screached in pain, but more poured into the chamber. A blast of energy pulsed out from the hissing throng that electrified my neurons in a blast of intense psychic power. It stunned me, and I fell to the floor and into their eager clutches. As I slipped into unconsciousness, I could hear the cries of their compatriots echo through the chamber as they clawed at their faces. Even in my addled state, it gave me a deep sense of satisfaction.



Illithid minds are particularly heinous, and most of the thoughts that dart and flick through their filthy little minds are toxic and disturbing. They are cunning, paranoid, and highly dangerous. And as I awoke, they clustered around me like carrion crawlers. I had to use all the energy I had left to protect my mind. I could feel the sharp spines of their psychic intent as they tried to penetrate my telepathic shroud and pry me out of my protective mental shell like a cave snail. One could never fully comprehend them but I could sense their overwhelming desire to devour novelty—the novelty being me, in this case. I wouldn't last much longer under their psychic knives.

But yet again, a command came to the mind flayers: Bring it to me. I could feel its power.

The mind flayers relented in their examination of me and proceeded to carry me bodily down a long series of convoluted tunnels and oddly-shaped caves. We eventually came into a massive temple lit with ancient crystals that hummed with magic.

It was there that I beheld the grotesque majesty of the elder brain, bristling with immense psychic energy.

You must want so badly to taste greatness, it said with a voice that saturated the psychic field. Release it. Let it bask in my intellect. Go ahead, take all you want. Feed on my glory.

It was overwhelming. Never have I felt such temptation to lose myself as I did when the elder brain offered me this infinite abundance, an endless reservoir of energy and psychic food. But through some miraculous beam of providence, even while I was gripped with fear and awe, I saw the illusion of it. It was a self-serving monstrosity that mimicked life. It was a starving hole that

would never be filled. And it was undead.

I knew something was wrong with the elder brain as soon as I touched its mind. When a being loses that which once made it alive, there is a shift in its frequency. A mental static. It is the magic that tries to mimic the purity of life. It had made a deal with a dark force, and now it was a sham.

That, and the fact that it smelled terrible.

You're not going to kill me, Great Brain? I didn't really know how to address it. The mind flayers relaxed their clawed hands with reluctance, their maws pulsed and their fangs clicked together with an unsettling, wet sound. They were agitated at having to release their prey. My skin had blanched a shade of fear I didn't know was possible.

I want you to live, peon. The elder brain pulsed in its vat of brine as the illithids finally released me. My tendrils hurt.

Thank you? I said. It came out as a question. I still wasn't feeling entirely safe.

You're welcome, the elder brain said with a sincerity that took me aback. I am a giver. I give, and give, and give. Sometimes, I wonder why I give so much, but that's who I am. Look around you. As the elder brain waved a tentacle about some dead flesh sloughed off and flopped into its foul nutrient vat. This temple, the beautiful stonework over there, the magical, crystal lighting, the exquisite carvings. I'm proud to say that I made this. I make things, big things. Because I think big.

I could feel the psychic force coming from the elder brain in massive waves. Its power to sway minds was remarkable, I could feel myself agreeing with it, even liking it, but somewhere within me there was an instinctual alarm going off like a shrieker.

I looked around. It really was a nice temple.

It . . . is a nice temple, I said. My nerves had been on such high alert that I couldn't feel my tendrils anymore.

Thank you. No really, thank you. The elder brain nodded assent in its

vat. I think this temple is the finest expression of architecture in the world. A great achievement. It speaks to my vision.

Your vision? I knew that my chances of leaving here alive were slim to none. If I pandered to the elder brain's ego too much, it would certainly destroy me for my insolence. If I didn't placate it, it would surely mean my death. The only thing keeping me alive right now was my telepathic shroud, but I was weakening under the pressure. That, and I was starting to feel funny. I was a little bit irritated with the whole situation. Then I looked around, and saw that I was in the middle of the thweem as it danced and swirled around the room.

You see, I lead people. I am the leader of everyone, the elder brain waved its big, stupid tentacles around the room, signifying all the illithids that stood around it, their clawed hands clasped in cowed reverence. All of them, all of you, everyone in the world. Why? Because I have the best ideas and the biggest ideas.

But . . . don't you just mind control everyone? I had to say it. As soon as it left my mind, I regretted it. I was sure that death was on its way.

Silence, flumph! That's just something losers say because they didn't think the big thoughts. I know the right way and they don't like it because they didn't think of it first. So they cry and complain like losers do. I know things that you can't even conceive of with your little, puny mind.

Oh really? Your brain is that big? I held back what I really wanted to say.

Of course, just look at it. If I wanted, with my awesome power, I could explode your head. The elder brain said this off-handedly but my life flashed before my eyestalks. And you want to know something else? I could explode all the heads if I wanted. Praise Orcus. The elder brain raised its tentacles upward in an arch over itself. The mind flayers quickly made arm gestures that mimicked the elder brain. As they did, they looked at one another nervously. Their face-tentacles hung limp and uncertain as they tried to find confirmation or solace in the eyes of their compatriots.

But everyone knows I'm great and loves my vision, so, lucky you. You all get to keep your heads. The elder brain relaxed into its pool

and let the brine soothe its cerebrum. His mind flayer toadies let out a sigh of relief. I am going to show you my vision. And let me tell you, flumph, after seeing it, you'll want to be a part of it, because everybody wants to be a part of it. You'd be a loser not to be a part of something this great.

All right. What do you want everyone to do? I figured I was dead anyway.

Join me in eternal undeath. The elder brain wriggled in the vat, pleased with his reveal.

That's horrible, I said.

That's because you can only see with that teeny, tiny, little jellyfish brain of yours. But I know better than everyone, and I will make all the things happen because I control all the brains! It began to get louder and its slimy tentacles gesticulated a hint of irritation. The illithids surrounding the vat all clapped excitedly in sycophantic assent.

Silence! The elder brain bellowed, and shook its tentacles. Brine mixed with cerebral goo slapped across the crowd. The clapping ceased.

Rage overtook me. I tried to resist but I. Just. Didn't. Give. A . . .

You don't make anything happen. You don't even make any sense! I said. You just sit here in a pool of slime and bully people, and wave your dumb tentacles around like a dope.

"What?" The elder brain was taken aback.

How much of the world have you seen? Nothing. You haven't even left this room. All your knowledge is secondhand, which makes you a secondhand intellect, you slimy, disgusting boor.

As I sent these thoughts upon a carrier wave of fury, my rational mind observed it all, helpless to stop it. I had sealed my fate, and yet somehow I felt liberated.

Maybe this rage wasn't such a bad thing after all.

I could feel a collective shudder go through the mind flayers.

You need these pathetic . . . umm, no insult coming to my mind . . . illithid flerbs—I indicated the mind flayers— more than they need you. You need them to listen to you, put up with your tantrums, and do all your dumb work, because without them, you're a helpless, bloated brain in a pan of goo. And because you are so, sooo, sad, you are reduced to mind controlling these poor creatures—

Loser! The elder brain pointed a tentacle at me and let loose with a blast of energy that hurled me from the room. I hurtled across the temple in a blur, slammed against a wall, and slid through a small drainage grate like a wet, boneless rat.



I awoke on my back in a cold puddle, every nerve fiber jangled and buzzed in a fiery dance of pain. I could feel the seething outrage from the elder brain as it mercilessly drove the mind flayers to search for me. They were to tear every last tendril from my corpse and then flay every nerve fiber from my body when they found me. But the psychic signature of the illithids was faint and far away. In a stroke of luck, I must have traveled unconscious through the drain for some distance away from my captors.

I came to my senses and tried in vain to right myself, but I could not flip myself over. I struggled with all my might. I tried to use my tendrils as a lever, but the stones were too slippery. Weakness filled my body, every nerve was fried from the elder brain's mind blast. With each attempt to flip myself over, I sapped reserves of strength until I was exhausted. For how long I lay there in the dark, I do not know. The cold, damp stone had slowly been soaking the heat from my body. I felt the pull of an eternal sleep drawing my consciousness ever deeper.

Then, a muffled noise broke the silence. Some creature drew near to me. My eyestalks were limp with fatigue, pressed under the disk of my body. Still I strained to look. It was a massive beast, a quadruped with huge fangs and jaws bigger than my entire body. It was covered with black fur, and it looked at me with its yellow eyes. I was doomed. Its head came close to me, and it took in my scent with short snorts. As I awaited the inevitable crush of its fangs, I felt another

presence behind the great beast, silent and still. As the other form moved closer, the subtle emotions of these two creatures swirled about. A bond of great friendship. Curiosity. Kindness.

It was a drow that stood over me, his purple eyes gazed at my pathetic state. Surely I was done for. Drow are the most evil of all despicable creatures, but I could feel no malice within this one. I was most certainly hallucinating.

The drow snorted and smiled. He flipped me over with the toe of his boot, my tendrils and eyestalks flopped over. Then a warm surge of healing energy filled me.

I was healed. Life had returned, and with it a longing to rejoin the cloister. I had learned much about myself, and the danger that had infused the thweem. I was ready to return to them and tell them of all I knew. I turned to thank my saviors, but they were already gone, vanished into the darkness, the drow and that beast-thing. What did he call it? Gwen-uh-varr?

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Interview: Jay Turner

From an early *Mass Effect* mauling to hanging with A-list demon lords, *Sword Coast Legends*'s narrative director shares his journey.

After graduating from New York's Rochester Institute of Technology in 1998 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in film and screenwriting, Jay Turner did what most people looking to break into the games industry did: he upped sticks and moved to California. First landing a gig at Gamepro.com and *GamePro* magazine, he eventually joined BioWare as an editor in 2004. Building up an impressive CV, he worked on *Jade Empire*, *Dragon Age*, a very early version of the *Mass Effect* script ("It all got tossed out"), and *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood*, before heading back to *Dragon Age*.

"*Dragon Age* is the closest I've come to working on D&D before *Sword Coast Legends*," he says.

"It was definitely inspired by BioWare's wish to bring back that *Baldur's Gate* feeling. They



Jay Turner

wanted to make a *Game of Thrones*/D&D-type title using their own IP, so they could really go wild with it.”

Joining the team working on *Mass Effect 2* took Turner to Montreal, where he helped start BioWare’s new studio in that city, before a job as principal writer at Visceral (*Army of Two: The Devil’s Cartel*, *Dead Space 3*) lured him away

“I then got a call from Dan Tudge at n-Space asking if I wanted to be involved in an awesome D&D game with a Dungeon Master, and would I help write the story? I went pretty crazy over that thought and took the job as principal writer and narrative director.”



(Select to view)

What are the first steps in writing the story for a game like *Sword Coast Legends*?

In this case we had a series of brainstorming sessions with all the key stakeholders in that story: so the executive producer, lead designer, lead engineer, and so forth. It really was a group process. We all put

our heads together and thought about what makes a great game story and what aspects we would like to see in it. Our executive producer had some things he wanted to make sure we touched on or areas of the Forgotten Realms that we should send the players to, while the art director had some ideas for environments. Then I went back into my writing cave and made a story with a path that made sense of all of that, with some cool characters and events that would unfold and keep the player interested.



(Select to view)

The idea isn't necessarily to tell the player our story, it's to give the player something interesting to drive them through the world and through the game. We have to balance the depth and breadth of the story with making sure that the gameplay is going to be fun and that we're not leading the player by the nose.

Did the story change much during that process?

It's the old saying that no battle plan survives contact with the enemy. I wrote down an outline that was originally very different from what we wound up with. But it started there. We had some review meetings and talked about the characters and started doing some early concept art. In this case we created a whole story outline and a pitch video that we were showing to publishers.

We put it in front of Wizards of the Coast to find out what they were doing with the property. At the time nobody knew what Forgotten Realms in fifth edition was going to look like, except Wizards, and

they were still putting it all together. It turned out that the game's details didn't fit with where Wizards were taking fifth edition. So we took the themes and the details of that story that we liked and rewrote it to fit their vision. I think it's a stronger story for it.

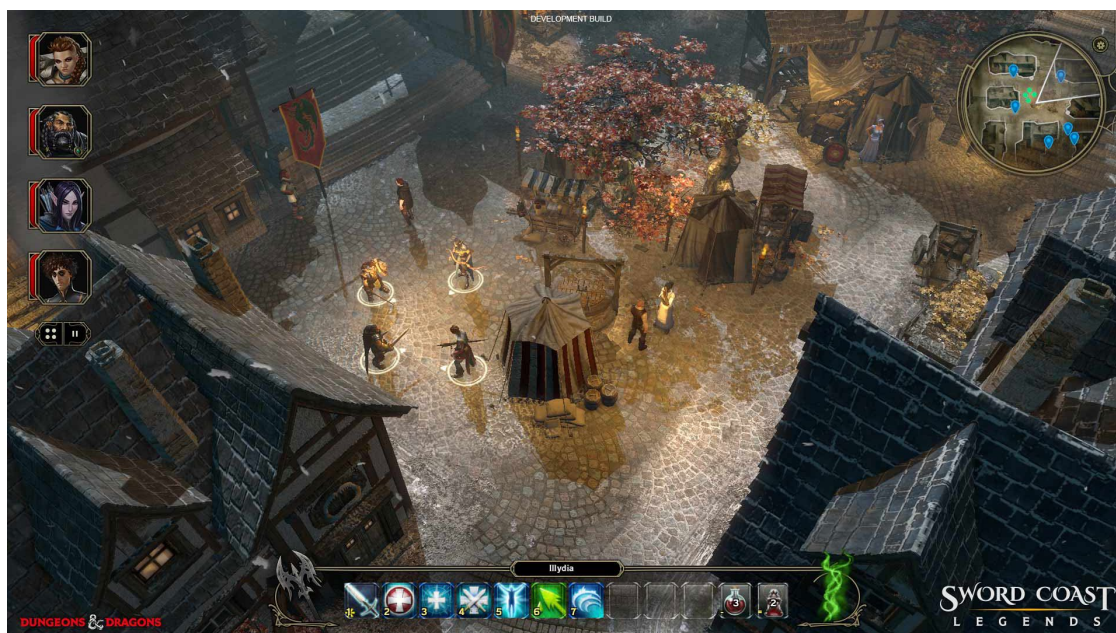


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What was the collaboration between n-Space and Wizards of the Coast like?

We had to be in close contact with them at all times to make sure that we were all on the same page. They provided us with a document that laid out the kinds of stories and characters they'd like to see: make sure that your characters are diverse, make sure that your stories don't touch on this or that, and make sure trigger situations don't go too crazy-dark like the *Saw* movies! Keep it D&D. From an art point of view, they also had some rules on what kind of range of skin tones a gold dwarf would have versus a shield dwarf, and stuff like that.

We had to meet their guidelines but at the end of the day they gave us a lot of free reign to make the story we wanted to tell. And we did get the lowdown on what's happening in Luskan at that point in time and what the major players in the Forgotten Realms are up to, so that we didn't do something that Drizzt is supposed to do in his novel, or claim that Luskan is a fluffy town full of unicorns and rainbows when it's actually a pirate town after the Sundering. So there was a lot of back and forth. We even created a faction called the Gilded Eye and Wizards liked it so much they said they plan to make it canon. So it was a two-way street.



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Was it good to see Wizards of the Coast embrace what you had created?

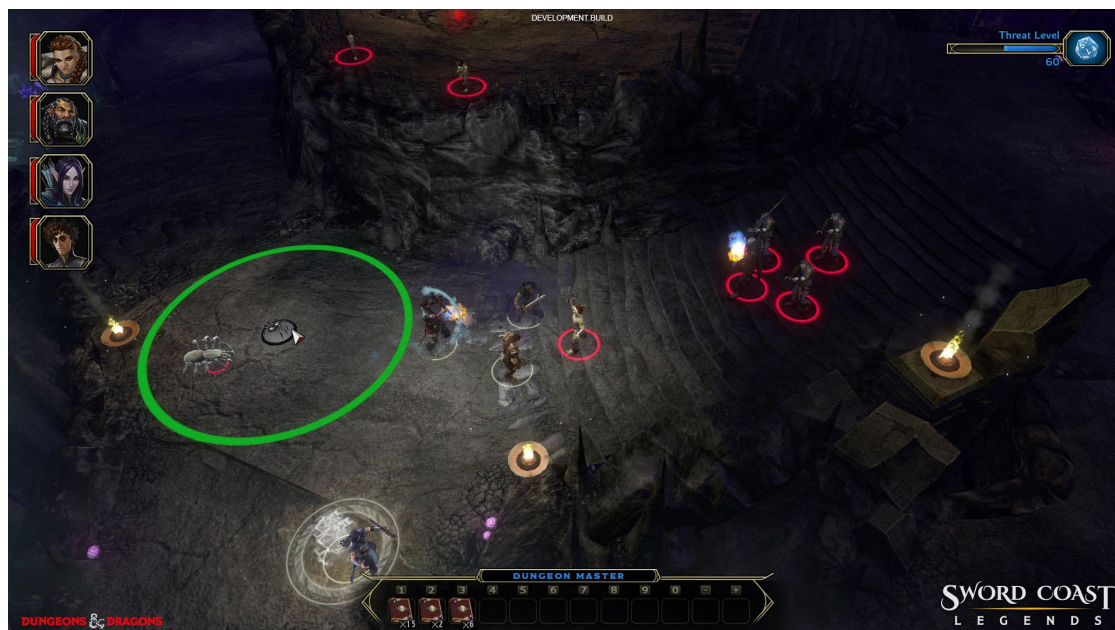
Even more exciting, Wizards was at the PAX event and its Rage of Demons booth had all the canon demon lords who have been there since the original days when Ed Greenwood created the Forgotten Realms. So there was Jubilex and Demogorgon and all those well-known demon princes. Right among all these major A-list celebrities was Belaphoss, the character we created for our game, looking like he'd grown up. It was really nice because we've had our heads down making the game and we didn't know what's getting out there and what wasn't. Seeing what we created for our little game showing up in official D&D products is huge for us. We're just a bunch of old D&D geeks.



(Select to view)

How important was it to even have a standalone story, as a big part of *Sword Coast Legends* will be the ability for *Dungeon Masters* to create their own stories?

We've always had two main visions for the game. The first core vision was to bring the feeling of playing D&D at the table to a videogame. So all the bantering, laughing, taunting, and complaining about the DM, we wanted all that to feature in the game and I think that comes across really strongly in the DM mode.



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The other vision was to have a good single-player story that made you feel as if your character was part of the world, like people did when they were playing *Baldur's Gate*, *Icwind Dale* or even *Dragon Age: Origins*. We wanted to harken back to that nostalgic feeling of playing a story campaign in a classic D&D videogame, but update it with all the modern gameplay conveniences that people have come to expect.

Will downloadable content (DLC) be a big part of the game?

More than just DLC, the vision is to have ongoing support of the product, but story content is definitely a major part of the DLC. In addition, content drops will include new classes, races, and items, and we'll be updating the DM tools. Not all of that stuff will cost the players anything, and if we're improving an existing DM feature we might just patch that in. We're planning to support the game as long

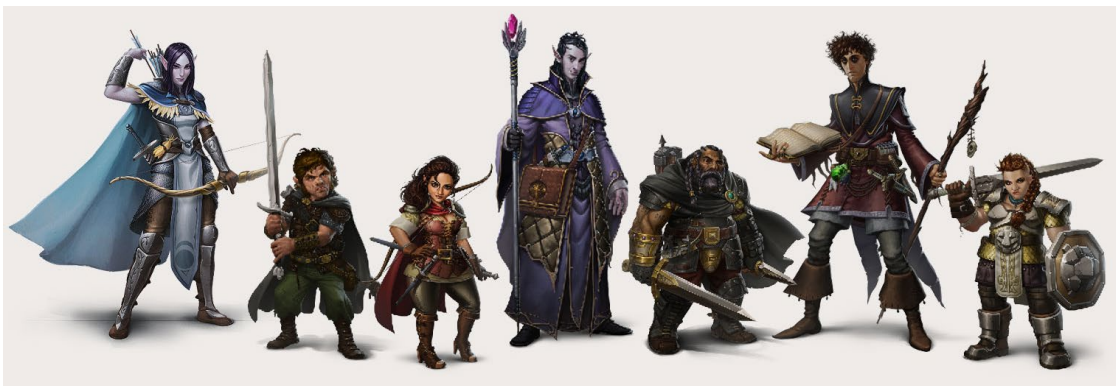
as people want to keep playing it.

The *Neverwinter* MMORPG videogame supports the big D&D campaigns, such as Elemental Evil and Rage of Demons. Will *Sword Coast Legends* follow the same path?

So far we've created our own content that aligns with those stories. Our storyline deals with a big demon named Belaphoss, which you may extrapolate was somewhat inspired by Rage of Demons. We'll work alongside Wizards and align our product with them where it makes sense. We don't necessarily have an imperative to match what they're doing one for one but it's better for everyone if we can lean on each other.

You've created a whole set of characters for the game. What went into that and did those ideas get changed along the way as well?

I've worked on past games where the whole roster of companions were invented. The idea is you need a fighter, a mage, a cleric, a ranger, and so on, and they are created independently and then fitted into the story. And as we were writing *Sword Coast Legends* we knew there were two or three characters that were important enough to that story that it would be good to have them around for the whole game, so they were created specifically to be companions for the player.



(Select to view)

With others we realised they were actually very compelling characters so we expanded their roles to make them into companions. It's almost like you run into an NPC in the tabletop roleplaying game and you like them so much you ask them to join your party. Wizards is actually very excited about our companion characters and getting them involved in things, and our cleric Illydia is going to be on the

cover of the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*.

Have you included any famous D&D characters?

Working with famous characters in the Forgotten Realms is tricky because there's so many cooks in the kitchen for those. For example, if we want to use Bruenor Battlehammer we need to know exactly what R.A. Salvatore is planning to do with him at any given moment. So for the core game we are obviously going to be in the same universe as those guys but you may not see famous people taking major roles. We did announce one particular Forgotten Realms celebrity who will be showing up in the Rage of Demons DLC, wielding two scimitars.

As Wizards have seen the fantastic job we're doing, they've started saying they're willing for us to use more characters. That's a really great feeling because a lot of times in licensed products you have to fight tooth and nail to get access to those. There are some situations where you meet up with a character who might be mentioned in the *Out of the Abyss* book and Wizards were like, "If you want to, you can have the players fight them and kill them." Wizards felt confident letting us have fun in their playground, which was really cool.

Sword Coast Legends launches on October 20, 2015 for PC, Mac, and Linux. It has also been announced for Xbox One and PlayStation 4.

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NEVERWINTER

STRONGHOLDS

COMING SOON: FALL 2015

PLAY FREE

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Streaming Highlights

The creators of *Rage of Demons* dig into the storyline, Canadian rocker Matthew Good talks about his love of the world of Greyhawk, and charity scores a critical hit with *Extra Life 2015*.



RAGE OF DEMONS

As the *Rage of Demons* storyline sweeps across the tabletop roleplaying game and the *Neverwinter* and *Sword Coast Legends* videogames, our epic trailer brings the demon lords and legendary drow ranger Drizzt Do'Urden to life.



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[Learn more](#)

DARE TO DESCEND

In a series of videos, Mike Mearls, Chris Perkins, and author R.A. Salvatore delve into the Underdark's past, discuss the threat the demon lords represent to the Forgotten Realms and explore Drizzt's struggles with sanity. (To view all *Rage of Demons* videos, click [here](#).)

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[Learn more](#)

CHAOITC NEUTRAL

Canadian rocker Matthew Good piqued the Wizards of the Coast team's interest with a new album titled *Chaotic Neutral*. He joined the official Dungeons & Dragons podcast to talk about the influence D&D has had on his life, his campaigns, his amazing mapping skills, and his love of the world of Greyhawk.

[LISTEN NOW](#)

ACQUISITIONS INC

The anarchic adventuring team took the stage at PAX Prime, as Binwin Bronzebottom, Omin Dran, and Jim Darkmagic mixed an awkward on-the-job evaluation with an Underdark rescue mission. As usual, madness ensued (at least this time the demon lords could be blamed for some of it).

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[Learn more](#)



D&D EXTRA LIFE 2015

This year's D&D Extra Life event (see page 22) lasted for forty-eight hours and raised over \$86,000 for Children's Miracle Network hospitals! Check out the highlights, and if you like what you see, it's not too late to donate [HERE](#) and change even more children's lives. The Twitch videos below will be available for a limited time and will later be available on the Dungeons & Dragons YouTube channel.

[Part 1 \(4 hours\)](#)

[Part 2 \(4 hours\)](#)

[Part 3 \(40 hours\)](#)

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Beyond the Board: An Introduction to Dice Masters

Dungeons & Dragons has expanded into the world of Dice Masters. Can you assemble an epic team and win the Battle for Faerûn?

The Tarrasque is a gargantuan monstrosity and possibly the most dreaded monster on the Material Plane. This fifty-foot tall scaly biped has a cavernous maw big enough to swallow all but the largest creatures, and its hunger is so great it can devour whole towns. If you're going to take this creature down, you're going to need some help. Step forward Marvel's Professor X...

Welcome to the world of *Dice Masters*, which already includes many

of the biggest pop-culture franchises, including superheroes from both the Marvel and DC universes, and the characters and creatures from Yu-Gi-Oh! Now the rich world of Dungeons & Dragons has been added to the mix courtesy of *Dice Masters: Battle for Faerûn*.



[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Playing *Dice Masters* is similar to creating a deck in *Magic: The Gathering*, as you build a team to do battle. Since all *Dice Masters* sets use a familiar system, the game allows for some unusual crossovers, including the one where the **X-Men leader faces off against a Tarrasque**. Its flexibility is one of the reasons the game has been such a success.

Of course *Battle for Faerûn* also plays well as a standalone set. It draws upon classic D&D elements to add several new mechanics to *Dice Masters*, including experience, equipment, breath weapons, and

a swarm ability.



(Select to view)

How To Play

If the following explanation sounds a little complicated, we suggest trialing a battle with another player to really understand *Dice Masters* and see how simple it is. Essentially, the game is a mix of cards and dice. The cards tell you what a particular die does, and there can be many versions of cards for the same die. Having great cards will help, but luck does also play a part, as gameplay centers on drawing dice from a bag, rolling them, then choosing your actions depending on what you rolled.

Initially you'll begin with eight white NPC character dice, which have six possible results when rolled: four different energy types; one side which can be any kind of energy; and a creature with one attack power and one defense that can be put into play for free. If you use energy from those dice to purchase creatures, spells or basic actions, the new dice are added to your team and can be fielded once they are drawn from the bag.

Organized Play

Getting involved with a local group playing Dungeons & Dragons Dice Masters: Battle for Faerûn is a great way to try out the game. Visit the WizKids Event System to find stores hosting Dice Masters events near you.

[LEARN MORE](#)

These organized events also allow you to get your hands on exclusive promotional cards with a blue border. See more details at the [Dice Masters website](#).

The colorful non-basic dice have different possible outcomes to the black and white NPCs. For example, when you roll a creature die, three of the sides will still give you energy (one energy showing on one side; two energy on the other two), while the remaining sides contain three levels of that creature, with different sets of stats and possibly different energy costs to field them and put them into play. It's the difference between rolling a Red Dragon with five attack and five defense that costs one energy to field, a 'middle' Red Dragon that is seven/seven and costs two to field, or one with eight in both stats that costs three energy to field. To find a much more in-depth run through of the *Dice Masters* rules, including a detailed combat example, click [here](#).

Alongside those general guidelines for playing *Dice Masters* sit the new abilities and rules that are specific to the *Battle for Faerûn* set.

EXPERIENCE: Given that many adventurer characters start off a little underpowered compared with their creature counterparts, experience is key to making them part of your team. When they defeat your opponent's monster dice, they gain +1 to both their attack and defense, leveling up as they would in the tabletop roleplaying game. This boost only lasts while they're in play and all experience is lost once they go to the used pile, but racking up experience bonuses can make them a powerful force during that time. Adventurers can also wield equipment such as magic swords and shields to make them even more powerful.

BREATH WEAPONS: A dragon's breath is usually powered up by spending energy and it can deal direct damage to your opponent and

all of their characters before they even have a chance to defend.

SWARM: This allows you to get a lot of creatures of the same type into play very quickly, sometimes giving them a buff based on how many you have in play.

ALIGNMENT: The time-honored D&D traits don't end there, though. Cards may be deemed good, neutral or evil, offering bonuses (or negatives) based on that alignment. The usual guild affiliations are also available, and are unique to this *Dice Masters* set, with cards being designated as belonging to the Emerald Enclave, the Harpers, the Lords' Alliance, the Order of the Gauntlet, and the Zhentarim.

Basic Build Strategy

Dice Masters is very easy to learn with only a starter set to your name, but adding booster packs to bolster your forces offers more depth and customization, including killer combos or theme-based parties. There are many tactics to building an effective team, but the most common strategy is to find two or three cards that work well together and then base your build around them.

As we explained above, when you roll a creature die and it doesn't land on energy, you have a chance of getting three different levels of that creature, with three different sets of stats. The Polymorph basic action card has an ability that can be used at any time by either player (this is known as a 'global' ability, and the energy you roll can be used to pay for these effects or trigger specific creature abilities). Polymorph allows you to 'spin' one creature down a level to spin another up to a higher form of that creature. Pairing this with the common version of the Troll card makes sense, as any of these trolls you have in play automatically spin up one level at the start of your turn, so they would gain back the level you used spinning them down to bring something more destructive (like a dragon) to its full potential.



(Select to view)

For a three-card combo, what about Magic Missile, a Red Dragon and an Elf Wizard? A Red Dragon's global ability allows you to buy action dice more cheaply (and does one damage to your opponent), while an Elf Wizard also lets you buy action dice at a cost of one less energy when she's fielded, making it cheap to pick up those Magic Missile dice and deal damage quickly. The bonus of using the Elf Wizard is that if you roll her dice and she only gives you energy, at least it's the Bolt energy which powers the Red Dragon's global ability. The Elf Wizard is also an adventurer, so if she's in play and you roll the best possible result on the Magic Missile dice, which is a bit like rolling a six, you can do extra damage equal to her level.

Master Tacticians

Of course, two or three cards don't make a successful dice build on their own, and you'll need to support this core strategy with other basic character, action, and equipment cards. Carrying on the example of our Magic Missile dice set, adding the Resurrection basic action card lets you spend a Shield energy to trigger a global action and choose another dice from your bag. This lets you cycle through dice even more quickly, hopefully helping those Magic Missiles deal damage more often. As we've established there are four energy types, so adding cheap characters to your team which provide Shield energy if they don't roll a creature side should help to trigger this Resurrection power more often.

Wider support on top of those cards must then look at countering any tactics your opponents may be using. As our Magic Missile team

includes a Red Dragon, its breath weapon can wipe out multiple smaller creatures if your opponent is trying to swarm. If your opponent opts for an aggressive attack team instead, you may need to add some blockers to protect you as you sit back and hurl your Magic Missiles. And if your opponent plays defensively and tries to redirect or reduce your damage, those blockers may become attackers to dish out some extra damage.

Below are some other examples of strategies that work well in Dungeons & Dragons *Dice Masters*: Battle for Faerun.



DRAGONS

Given what the second ‘D’ in D&D stands for, this *Dice Masters* set naturally has dragons in abundance, and they’re as powerful as you would expect (in fact, a dragon-based team made it deep into the 2015 *Dice Masters* World Championships). In part this is because of their breath weapons. This ability allows them to do additional damage to all defending characters when they declare an attack, which is a great way to clear out smaller creatures and adventurers. They are particularly powerful when combined with the Half-Dragon, who makes dragons easier to purchase and cheaper to field when he’s

in play. If you're lucky enough to have the rare 'Paragon Humanoid' Half-Dragon, he also makes it very cheap to buy basic action dice, which works well with the example Magic Missile team we discussed above.

ALIGNMENT

Battle for Faerûn is the first *Dice Masters* set to brand certain cards as either good, neutral, or evil. This encourages players to create builds based around cards that give out bonuses for being a certain alignment. For example, a Unicorn can top up a player's life whenever a good character is fielded; or using a Pit Fiend can help get more evil Fiends into play.

SWARM

Teams built on the Swarm mechanism can be highly effective. Swarm characters allow you to draw an extra die at the start of your turn. If the die from your bag is the same as the Swarm character you already have fielded, you can draw again from your bag. If that die is also the same, you can draw again, as this ability can trigger multiple times per turn.

Conclusion

Dice Masters: Battle for Faerûn is a whole new way to play with all of the iconic D&D monsters and characters you know and love. It only takes a starter set and a few boosters to get some really good games going and as your collection builds, so does your strategy. With the expansion set *Faerûn under Siege* slated for February 2016, there's never been a better time to get on board.

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The background of the advertisement is a detailed illustration of a fantasy battle scene. A large, green dragon with yellow horns and a white underbelly is breathing fire. In the foreground, a knight in full plate armor is seen from the back, looking towards the dragon. To the left, a warrior in chainmail and a purple cape holds a shield. To the right, a woman in a red robe and a man in a white robe are also engaged in the battle. The scene is set in a rocky, mountainous landscape with a large, dark, triangular stone block in the foreground.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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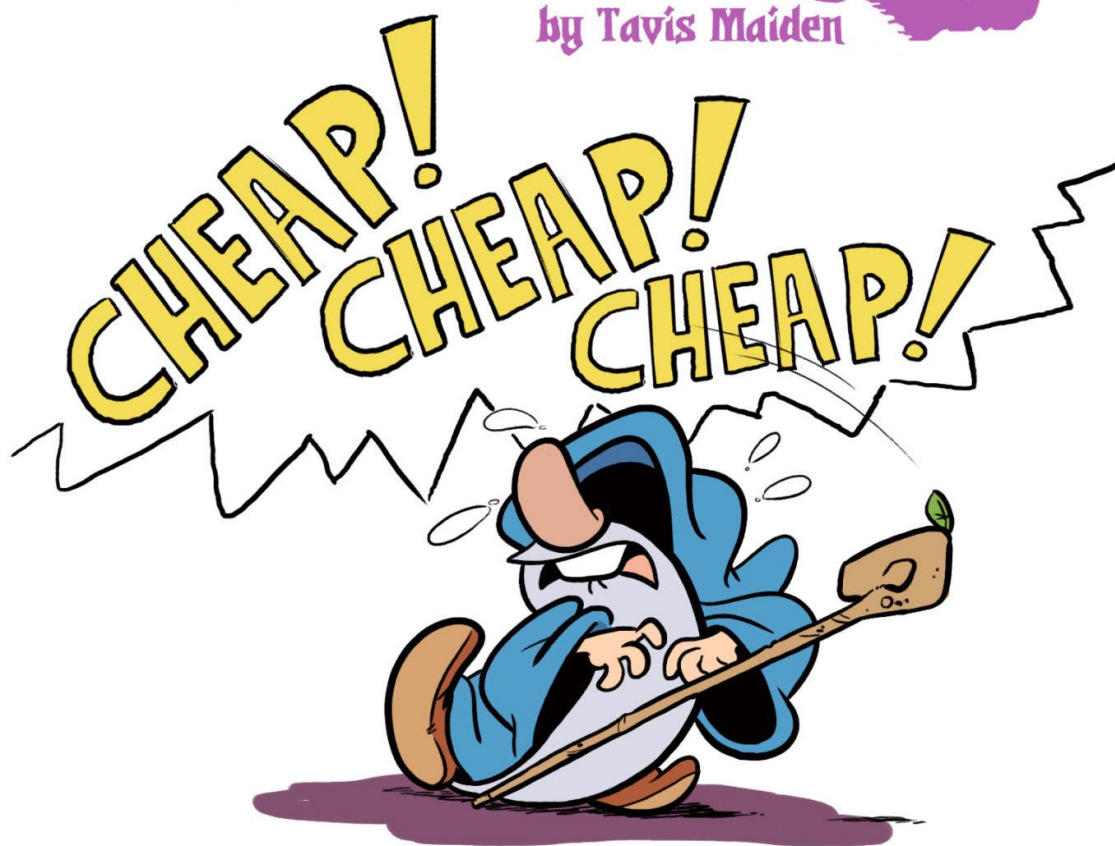
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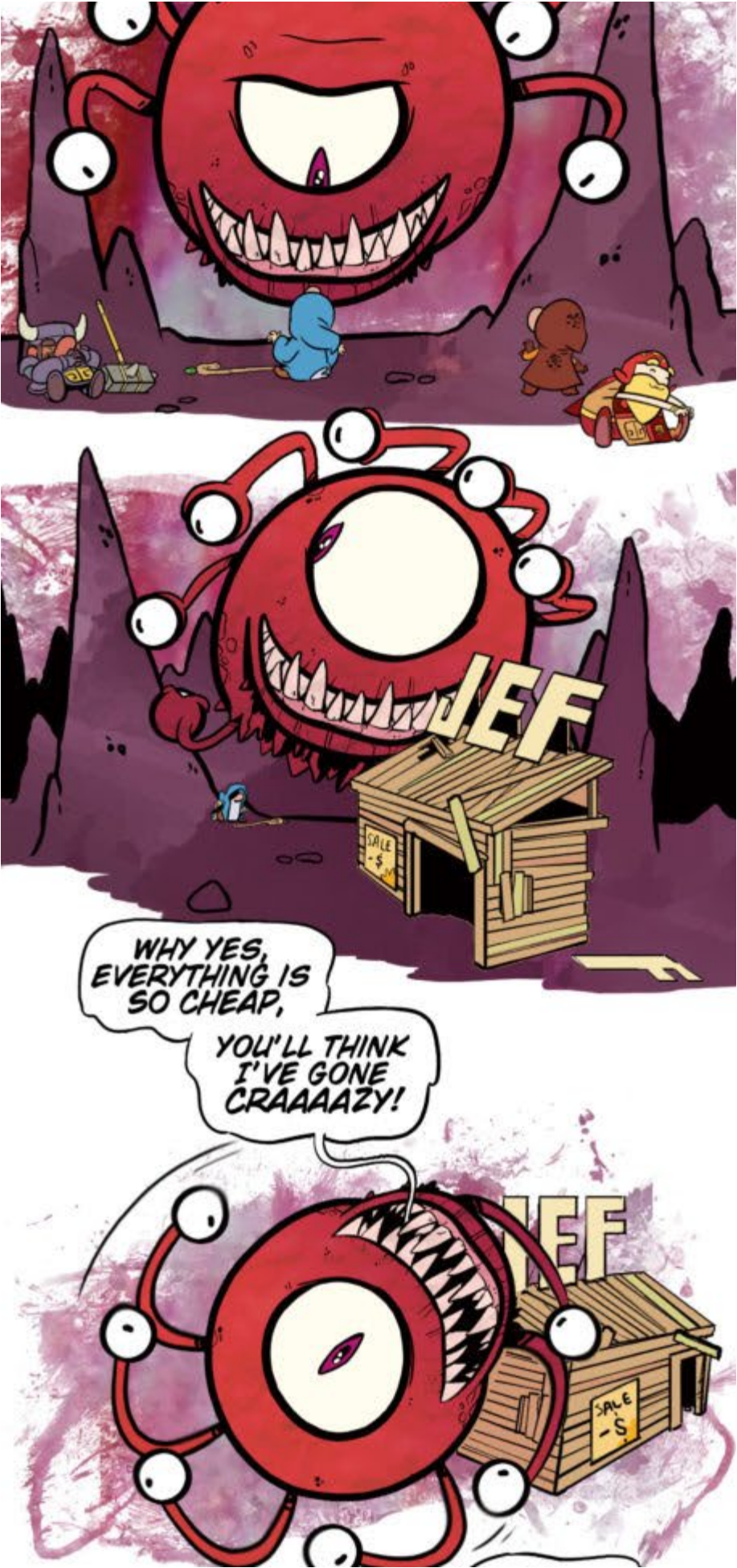


Scott Kurtz
presents

GAUNTLET GOPHERS

by Tavis Maiden



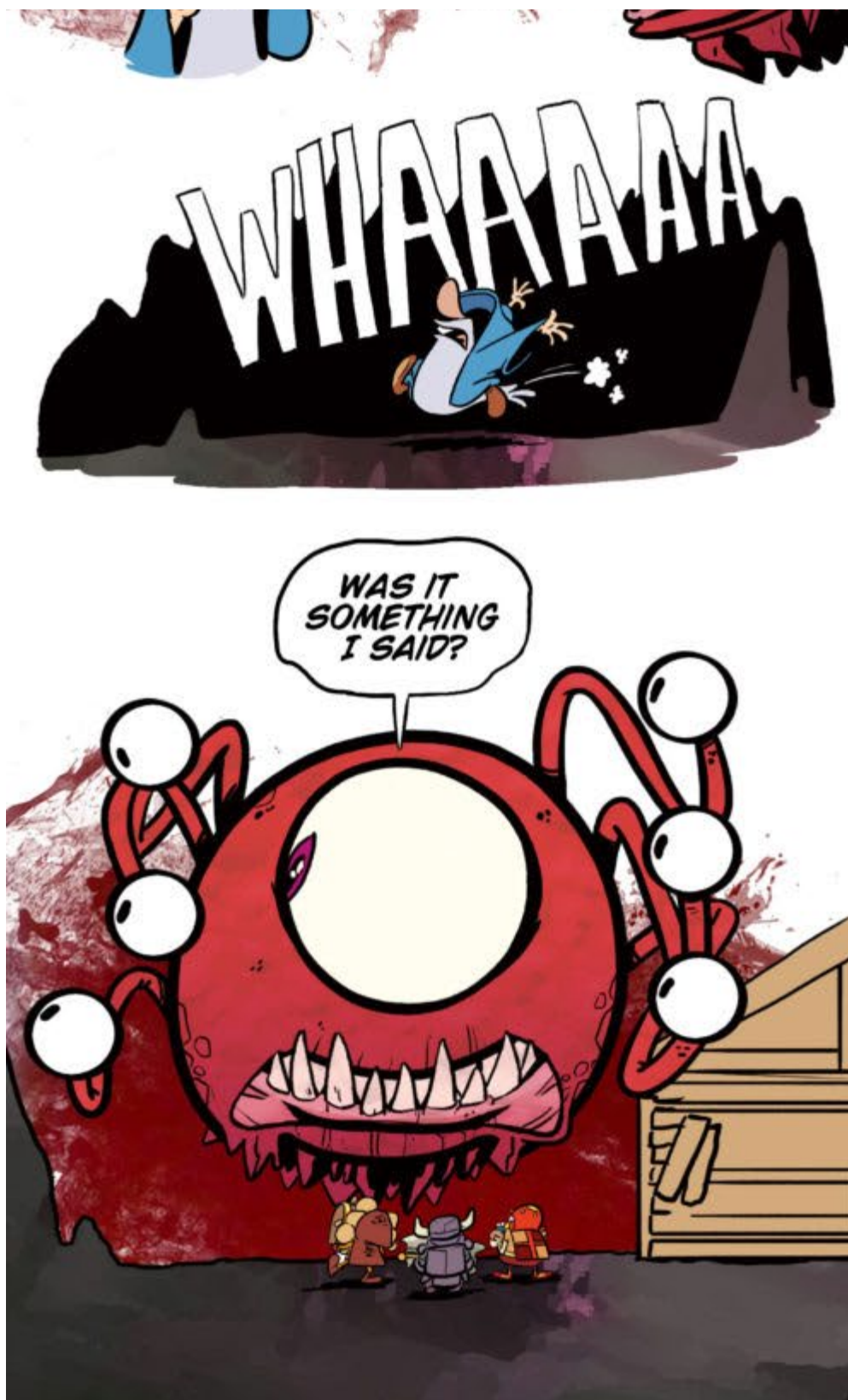


WHY YES,
EVERYTHING IS
SO CHEAP,

YOU'LL THINK
I'VE GONE
CRAAAAZY!







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Adventurer's League: Tavern Tales

Greg Bilsland relives the sugary highs and the caffeine lows of the forty-eight-hour Extra Life charity fundraiser, while the Red Plumes are up to no good in the Hillsfar region in Shackles of Blood.

EXTRA LIFE

Joined by stores and members of the D&D community, Wizards of the Coast returned for a third year to participate in Extra Life, raising almost \$90,000 for Children's Miracle Network hospitals. The main event, a forty-eight-hour D&D marathon held at Wizards, took place on Tabletop Appreciation Weekend and had twelve DMs and over forty players participating on site.



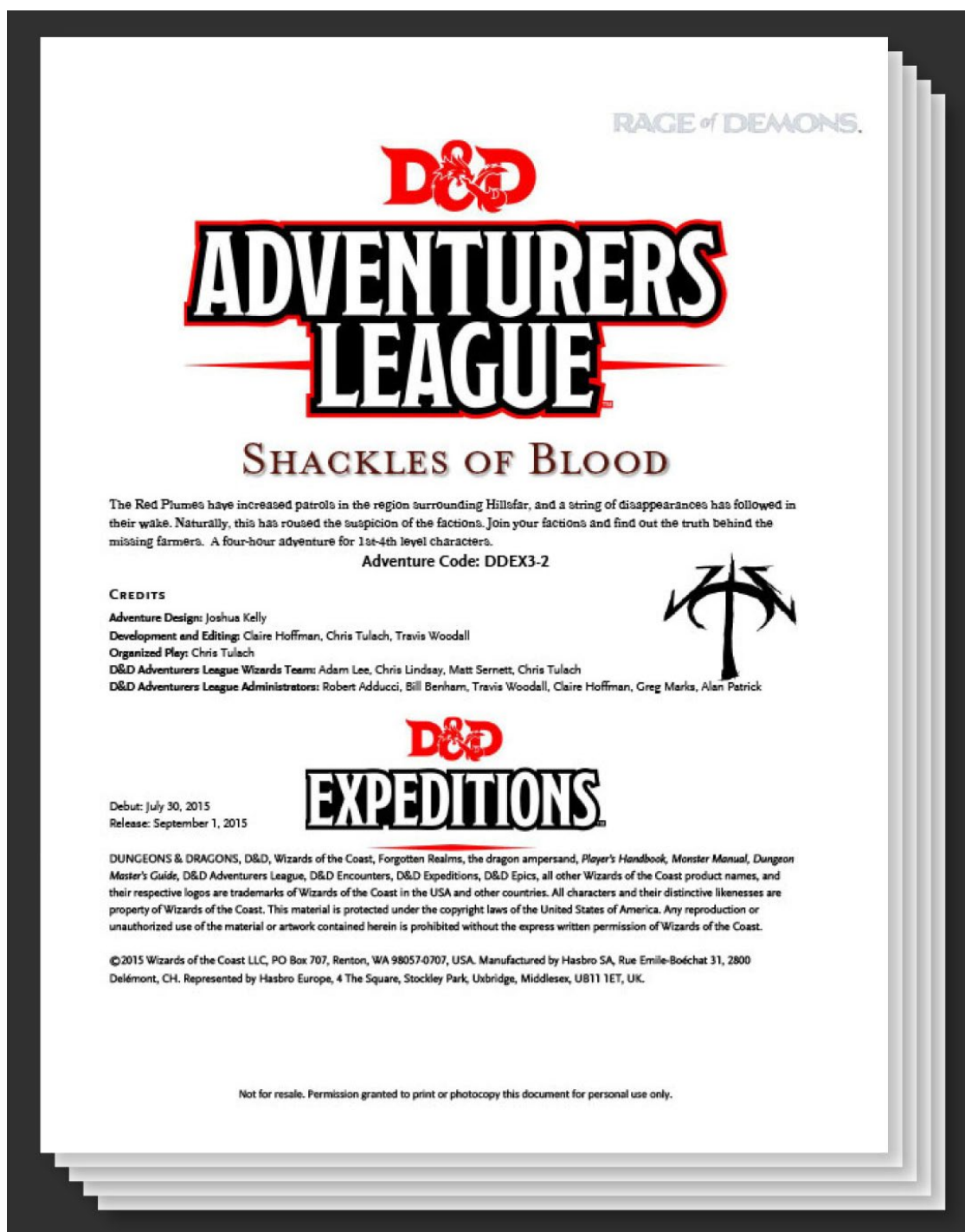
Although the event was explicitly an Adventurer's League activity, participating members of the team who raise over \$50 and complete a survey will receive a special magic item certificate for use in Organized Play. Best yet, it's not too late to participate! The team's

target is \$100,000, and it has until the end of the year to reach the goal. The main Extra Life event is coming November 7 – 8, so you can still plan an event at home or in your store. Play through *Out of the Abyss* or the *Rage of Demons* D&D Expeditions adventures. **Join** the D&D Extra Life team!



RAGE OF DEMONS

The Rage of Demons storyline continues to rock the D&D Adventurers League, with a new adventure set in Hillsfar. The Red Plumes are the ultimate law in this xenophobic and totalitarian region and they do not tolerate non-humans. To that end, they've increased patrols in the areas surrounding Hillsfar, and a string of disappearances has followed in their wake.



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Naturally, this has roused the suspicion of the factions, who have sent members to investigate. Will those looking for aid for the villagers of Phlan or travelling to see a production of The Poppet's History of Hillsfar at a local theatre also find themselves caught up in these shady goings on?

Shackles of Blood was designed by Joshua Kelley for D&D

characters from levels one to four, and is available to all stores in the Wizards Play Network. As a special treat for *Dragon*+ readers, you can also download it for free using the button on this page and continue your *Rage of Demons* story.

For more information on the D&D Adventurers League, including character sheets and the Player's Guide, head [here](#).



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Next Issue: Dragon 04



Join D&D author Erin M. Evans as she discusses *Ashes of the Tyrant*, her fifth book in the Brimstone Angels series, which is out in hardcover on December 29, 2015. In a direct follow-up to *Fire in the Blood*, she thrusts her signature character Farideh into a fast-paced murder mystery rife with political intrigue.



In the wake of the war brought on by the Sundering, Farideh's adopted father Mehen has been called back by the clan that cast him out, and Farideh and Havilar mean to go with him.

"What that doesn't tell you is that this story fits into the Rage of Demons story arc. So if you are curious to read more of that, more of what's happening in the world beyond the Sword Coast, this is your book," says Evans.

That should be enough of a draw in itself, but *Ashes of the Tyrant* also introduces readers to the family of Harper agent Dahl Peredur. Evans describes his grandmother as "the single greatest thing I've ever written."



Plus, we'll feature the upcoming release of Beamdog's *Siege of Dragonspear*, an all-new D&D videogame tied to the classic *Baldur's Gate* series. Sitting between *Baldur's Gate* and *Baldur's Gate II*, this twenty-five-hour expansion sees you hot on the trail of a charismatic warrior known as the Shining Lady. She claims to follow a divine agenda and leads her army on a crusade from the north. Baldur's Gate has put its faith in you, but you must determine whose interests you truly serve before you face the Shining Lady among the ruins of Dragonspear Castle.

Find all this and much, much more in *Dragon+* Issue 5, releasing in December!

(Contents subject to change)

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A big thank you to the extended D&D family for
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